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ABSTRACT

This collection of essays and articles on education reform highlights many of the issues of greatest interest to educators and the public. Articles are grouped into the following categories: (1) "The Front Lines" (9 selections); (2) "Charter Schools" (4 selections); (3) "School Choice" (4 selections); (4) "Standards, Tests, and Accountability" (10 selections); (5) "Teacher Quality" (7 selections); (6) "Curriculum & Content" (4 selections); (7) "Higher Education" (4 selections); and (8) "Grab Bag" (5 selections). (SLD)

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OUTSIDE THE BOX

Selected Readings on School Reform

Winter 1999
Vol. 3, No. 1

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Winter 1999

Dear Education Reformer,

Happy New Year and welcome to the third volume of *Selected Readings on School Reform*. We're glad to be back with your quarterly infusion of insightful essays and informative articles. We ask only that you don't use this for firewood!

That would be a real waste, because this issue contains some true gems. Our favorite would have to be (old friend and Fordham trustee) Diane Ravitch's *Education Week* commentary, "What if Research Really Mattered?" Diane recently suffered a serious illness. We're thankful that she benefited from the fruits of modern medical research. Too bad our sick schools must rely on the (mostly) quackery that passes for education research.

We're also glad to bring you a pair of articles that take opposite sides on an important school reform debate: should schools aim for "comprehensive" reform, or simply focus on such basics as reading? Nicholas Lemann's *Atlantic Monthly* piece and John J. DiIulio's *Weekly Standard* essay offer different but compelling answers.

Our charter schools section features an excellent close-up on Don Fisher, founder of The Gap and ardent school reformer. His $25 million donation for the creation of San Francisco-area charter schools that will be managed by the Edison Project has sparked a lively controversy. Read about it in Julian Guthrie's article, "The Fisher King."

Finally, we include several excellent pieces by *Washington Post* writer Jay Mathews. We were especially impressed by his piece, "Take Out Your No. 2 Pencil," which examines standardized testing and its impact on real kids.

Many hands went into the publication of this issue. We appreciate the help of interns Susan Flora and Jake Phillips and of visiting research fellow Carlene Wilson, whom we're grateful to have borrowed from Australia for a few months.

Enjoy the winter. You'll see us again in April.

Sincerely,

Chester E. Finn, Jr.
President

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Network Notes

School Choice

Giving Choice a Chance: Cleveland and the Future of School Reform

In this short report, the Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solutions recounts the remarkable Cleveland voucher saga. It shows that while passing a voucher bill through a state legislature is akin to passing a camel through the eye of a needle, it is not impossible. Besides, it's more promising than ballot initiatives, which have been consistently defeated.

This report takes the reader from the early days of the debate in Ohio, through the political battles, and into the present, which finds thousands of low-income Cleveland families happily sending their children to the schools of their choice. Though the story is compelling in its own right, it also offers a roadmap for other states and communities to follow. Get your copy of *Giving Choice a Chance* by writing the Buckeye Institute at 131 N. Ludlow Street, Suite 317, Dayton, OH 45402, by calling 937-224-8352, by faxing 937-224-8457, or by surfing to www.buckeyeinstitute.org. It's free. •*MJP*

Vouchers for School Choice: Challenge or Opportunity?

In May 1997, the Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies and the Columbus School of Law at the Catholic University of America convened a non-partisan conference to explore the issue of school vouchers from an informed American-Jewish perspective. The record of the presentations and roundtable discussions held on that occasion is now available in this published volume.

Marshall J. Breger and David M. Gordis, co-convenors of the conference and editors of the book, stay true to their purpose in that they present a broad range of views and perspectives. That, of course, also means that the volume as a whole is inconclusive with respect to the fractious issues that it addresses. But several items are first rate. In particular, we commend to you Rev. (and then Congressman) Floyd Flake's remarks, "A Minority Perspective."

To order a copy of this book, contact The Wilstein Institute by mail at 43 Hawes St., Brookline, MA 02446, by telephone at 617-278-4974, by fax at 617-264-9264, or by email at wilstein@hebrewcollege.edu. The cost is $12.95 plus $1.50 for shipping and handling. •*SMF*

Charter Schools

Innovation & Massachusetts Charter Schools

The Massachusetts Department of Education has released the final report of a legislatively mandated study of the state's charter schools. It appraises innovative practices in the Bay State's then-existing 24 charter schools (the number has since risen) and examines the extent to which they affect the traditional public school system.

Although the researchers recognize that this evaluation is somewhat premature, since charter schools in Massachusetts have been in operation for just a few years, the study did

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turn up some very interesting—and mostly positive—findings. Primarily, it finds that charter schools benefit from having both autonomy and accountability and that much of their success to date stems from the fact that each school operates around a unifying vision. This suggests that public schools should borrow more than specific practices from charter schools, and should begin to think in terms of a "whole school" model. Unfortunately, at this point, public schools show little evidence, at least in Massachusetts, that they are using ideas or practices developed in the charter schools. Indeed, the study finds them rather resistant—and the explanation it adduces is another reason to obtain your own copy and see for yourself.

Order your copy by writing the Massachusetts Department of Education at 350 Main St., Malden, MA 02148-5023, by phoning 781-388-3300, or by faxing 781-388-3396. Alternatively, surf to www.doe.mass. edu. •*SMF*

Charter Schools: Another Flawed Educational Reform?

Despite its sensationalist title, Seymour B. Sarason provides a useful insight or two about the charter school movement in his latest book. He builds on his 1972 work, *The Creation of Settings and Future Societies*, wherein he investigated the challenges of creating new environments (such as schools). Sarason now argues that most charter school founders will underestimate the difficulty of forging a new, coherent organization. They will lack the resources (fiscal, social, political, etc.) to do it successfully. And while it will stand as a radical and justified critique of the current school system, the charter school movement will fail like other reforms before it.

We are more optimistic about this reform's potential. (It's also not clear whether Sarason has ever seen an education reform that he liked!) But his words of caution should be heeded by anyone daring enough to try to start a charter school. It *is* an extremely difficult task and one fraught with difficulty. Potential school founders would be wise to contemplate the issues that concern Sarason before embarking on their charter adventure. But we hope that they prove him wrong!

Charter Schools is published by Teachers College Press and is available in bookstores (ISBN# 0-8077-3784-4) for $17.95. •*MJP*

Beyond the Rhetoric of Charter School Reform

It's a shame that the summary and press release accompanying this recent UCLA charter school study are so much at odds with the actual findings. The full report provides a thoughtful, reasonably balanced analysis of the charter school movement as it is playing out in ten California districts. It shows that charter schools face much difficult work, must appropriate lots of outside help, and must overcome high political and fiscal hurdles. And it also shows that accountability systems—for charters and regular public schools alike—need to be sharpened and strengthened.

But the press release—and most of the ensuing coverage—told a very different story. "Charter schools may be at the forefront of privatization" screamed the release. Its executive summary concludes, "It is time to reassess this 'magic bullet' of school reform and to raise harder questions about equity."

Those are strong words. But not too surprising, considering that their lead author, Amy Stuart Wells, is a longtime critic of charter schools and pal of the national teachers unions. She claims this as the "most in-depth study of charter schools" ever, which is total nonsense—we know at least two studies with heaps more data—and tries to offer case studies of 17 schools as compelling evidence to halt a booming and mostly promising reform strategy.

This report has inflicted some damage on the charter movement—damage not really warranted by its actual findings. You might want a copy so that you can respond to its accusations. (You should also check out Eric Premack's excellent point-by-point rebuttal, which is posted on the web at www.csus.edu/ier/charter/news.html.) The report is available by contacting Ms. Wells at 310-825-9903. •*MJP*

Student Achievement

Exploring Rapid Achievement Gains in North Carolina and Texas

The National Education Goals Panel—which faces an uncertain reauthorization and is

striving to make itself useful—recently debuted a new series of reports, "Lessons from the States," with an insightful analysis of school reform in the Tarheel and Lone-Star States. These two jurisdictions stand out due to their impressive gains on NAEP reading and mathematics tests and other indicators tracked by the Goals Panel.

The Panel has sought to explain the student achievement gains. This report delivers their findings. Lo and behold, it was *not* per-pupil spending, teacher/pupil ratios, teachers with advanced degrees, or years of teacher experience. So what was it? Accountability, coupled with greater school autonomy, is what researchers David Grissmer and Ann Flanagan found. Each state developed a comprehensive accountability system, complete with standards, assessments, and consequences, and each such system enjoyed the support of the business community that helped them "stick to their guns" through a shifting political landscape. Both states also turned their schools loose, allowing them greater autonomy in return for accountability.

This news is good not only for North Carolina and Texas, but also for the many other states following the path of standards-based reform. To see for yourself, write the National Education Goals Panel at 1255 22nd St., NW, Suite 502, Washington, DC 20037; telephone 202-724-0015, fax 202-632-0957, or surf to www.negp.gov. It's free. •*MJP*

Technology Counts and ***Does It Compute? The Relationship Between Educational Technology and Student Achievement in Mathematics***

It's in the way that you use it. That's the main finding on the impact of educational technology on student achievement, according to ETS's recent research report that serves as the centerpiece of the 1998 edition of *Technology Counts*, *Education Week's* ill-titled annual.

The ETS study found that computers boost learning when used in particular ways at particular ages; however, it also found a negative correlation between the amount of time students spent using computers in the classroom and their performance on mathematics tests. When technology is fully integrated into a well-designed lesson plan, student achievement rises. But when it is used in isolation and for "drill and kill" exercises, achievement suffers.

The implications are big: billions in investments in computer hardware cannot be expected to boost student achievement. Teachers must be prepared to use these things wisely. They must have the desire to integrate computers into their everyday pedagogy, or else the technology will be wasted, or worse, do harm. And the teachers most apt to do this successfully—smart ones with solid grounding in their subject matter—are the kind we need to recruit into our schools in greater numbers. We'll only get them if we focus as much on *teacher quality* as on computer technology.

Copies of *Does It Compute?* may be obtained by writing the Policy Information Center at Mail Stop 04-R, Educational Testing Service, Rosedale Rd., Princeton, NJ 08541-0001 or calling 609-734-5694. It will cost you $9.50. Or you can download a copy from www.ets.org/research/pic. *Technology Counts* may be obtained by sending $6 to Education Week-Technology Counts '98, 6935 Arlington Rd., Suite 100, Bethesda, MD 20814, by calling 800-346-1834, or by surfing to www.edweek.org. •*JRP*

Order in the Classroom: Violence, Discipline, and Student Achievement

Although last year's shootings in Arkansas, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Washington are extreme examples of school safety gone awry, they generated uneasiness about discipline and order in the schools. The Educational Testing Service responded to these concerns with this recent report.

It examines school discipline problems, not only exploring the incidence of real violence but also focusing on the day-to-day disruptions that teachers face. It also reviews approaches used in schools to alleviate violent acts and disorder. In addition to providing this information, ETS demonstrates how the role of order and discipline in the classroom is linked to student achievement. The analysts contend that discipline does matter, beyond issues of safety and security, in that it impacts student learning. Researchers conclude that classroom order should occupy a central place in school reform since it affects the ability of our teachers to teach and our students to learn.

Copies of *Order in the Classroom* are available for $10.50, prepaid, by writing the Policy Information Center, Mail Stop 04-R, Educational

Testing Service, Rosedale Road, Princeton, NJ 08541-001 or by calling 609-734-5694. You can also surf to their website at www.ets.org where the report can be downloaded for free. •*SMF*

The Way We Were? Debunking the Myth of America's Declining Schools

In this short book, Richard Rothstein challenges the claim that America's schools are failing. Summing up his argument, he cites a variation of the Will Rogers quote, "The schools ain't what they used to be and probably never were." Rothstein asserts that the cries of many of today's reformers, from Bennett to Riley, only mimic the charges of every preceding era in the twentieth century. From this starting point, he evaluates a host of statistics, ultimately purporting to prove that education today shares its mediocrity with every prior era of this century.

Maybe so. But we think he's beating a dead horse. The important question isn't whether today's schools are better or worse than yesterday's. It's whether they're good enough for today and tomorrow and, if not, what must be done to strengthen them. To that question, Rothstein does not offer a compelling answer.

Find *The Way We Were?* in your local bookstore (ISBN# 0-8707-8417-X). It will cost you $11.95. •*JRP*

Standards & Accountability

Making Standards Matter 1998

The American Federation of Teachers is back with its valuable annual appraisal of state efforts to raise academic standards. Its major findings: every state except Iowa has set or is setting such standards; the overall quality of their standards is (slowly) improving; math and science standards tend to be stronger than those in English and history; most states are still developing assessments based on their standards; ending social promotion and requiring high school exit exams are getting more popular; and more states are funding academic intervention programs for students who are falling behind.

The report acknowledges the other groups (the Council for Basic Education and, yes, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation) that have joined the AFT in appraising state standards. It even states that "there is 95 percent agreement between the judgments expressed in this year's AFT review of social studies standards and those offered in Fordham's review of history standards." Not surprisingly, we find their judgments quite sound, though still limited to clarity and specificity, rather than rigor. We suggest using the Fordham reports to gauge the quality of academic standards, but checking out *Making Standards Matter* for reliable information on other elements of states' accountability systems.

Get your copy by sending a self-addressed envelope with a prepaid money order to the American Federation of Teachers Order Department, 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20001. Ask for Item #263; it will cost you $10 for a single copy or $8 each for five or more. Call Heidi Glidden (the lead author) at 202-393-7476 if you have any questions. You can also find the report on the AFT web site (www.aft.org). •*MJP*

Getting Results: A Fresh Look at School Accountability

The Southern Regional Education Board lays out a sensible blueprint for school accountability in this recent report. It argues that a quality accountability system includes: content and student achievement standards; testing; professional development; accountability reporting; and rewards, sanctions, and targeted assistance. For each of these key components, it adumbrates the essential elements. For example, what should school "report cards" accomplish? (The report's answers: focus on student achievement; be useful for school improvement; be concise; be timely; show trends; give school-,district-, and state-level information; and include data on groups of students within schools.)

The report is attractive and user-friendly and can serve as a helpful resource for policymakers. Get yours by writing the Southern Regional Education Board at 592 10th St., NW, Atlanta, GA 30318, by calling 404-875-9211, or by surfing to www.sreb.org. It's free. •*MJP*

Public Accountability for Student Success

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) provides another blueprint for education accountability systems in this

recent report. The recommendations are predictable but sound: focus on student achievement, make sure that there are incentives for students and schools to perform, collect and publish data based on results, etc. Unfortunately, the prose is so loaded with education jargon as to be almost impenetrable.

The most useful resources provided are vignettes and sidebars on "what's working" in various states and cities. We were especially heartened to see a box highlighting Massachusetts's charter school accountability design as an example for other states and systems to emulate.

This makes a nice, if wonkish, companion to the SREB report. You can get a copy by sending a check or money order for $14.00 to NASBE, 1012 Cameron St., Alexandria, VA 22314 or by calling 800-220-5183. •*MJP*

Policy Options for Standards-Based Reform

The National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators (NCITE) has compiled an excellent, user-friendly policy guide to help states develop strong accountability and reporting systems. Its suggestions are generally sound (though we might quibble with a few), but its greatest assets are the sections of legislation taken verbatim from states that have already implemented these policies. The suggestions and examples cover topics including school and district-level accountability reports; rewards and sanctions; school, district, and state level improvement programs; assessments; and content standards.

This guide takes the accountability policy suggestions of groups like SREB and NASBE and makes them more concrete. Get a copy by calling Douglas Carnine of NCITE at 541-683-7543 or faxing him at 541-346-5818. It will cost you ten bucks. It's well worth it. •*MJP*

The National Assessment

Overseeing the Nation's Report Card

Historian Maris Vinovskis was recently asked by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) to chronicle NAGB's first ten years. This is in connection with the upcoming Congressional reauthorization of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Vinovskis has done a masterly job of setting forth a complex saga as this more-or-less independent board (on which I had the privilege of serving for eight years) has sought to set standards (known as "achievement levels") by which NAEP results are now reported and has made other important decisions. Actually, Vinovskis tells an even more ambitious story, as he recounts the almost thirty year history of NAEP as well. Although, in my view, he pulls some punches when it comes to future issues (e.g. the extent of NAGB's independence from the Education Department), he has done a first rate job of recounting the past.

Anyone interested in national standards and testing, or wanting to know more about NAEP, would do well to read this free 90-page report. Write the National Assessment Governing Board at 800 N. Capitol St., NW, Suite 825, Washington, DC 20002, call them at 202-357-6938, fax them at 202-357-6945, or surf to www.nagb.org. •*CEFjr*

Grading the Nation's Report Card

The Board on Testing and Assessment of the National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council was retained at great expense by the Department of Education to evaluate the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). That panel has now published its 259-page report, and a miserable piece of work it is. It recommends what amounts to a full employment program for education researchers by taking what is now a relatively straightforward barometer of student achievement and turning it into a mass of complex studies of just about every aspect of U.S. education. The one thing you would NOT be able to determine from so intricate a design is just how well the nation's children are doing in terms of academic skills and knowledge.

The Academy's report, moreover, deprecates NAEP achievement levels, terming them "fundamentally flawed," without suggesting any viable alternative. (The Academy later slipped word to the Education Department that, in return for another fat grant, it might be willing to come up with another approach to standard-setting.) Nobody ever claimed the achievement level-setting process is perfect. But since NAEP's achievement levels are presently the closest thing there is to national academic standards for the U.S., and are widely accepted by many users,

it's simply irresponsible to term them flawed without recommending a better way to do this.

Still and all, you may want to see for yourself. In which case contact the National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20418. Phone 800-624-6242 (in the DC area, phone 202-334-3313) or surf to www.nap.edu. It costs $34.36. •*CEFjr*

Standards Count

What should NAEP's next ten years look like? That's the question this collection of papers from the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) and the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) attempt to answer. Prepared for NAGB's tenth anniversary symposium, they provide a roadmap to the future of national assessment and testing. International, state, and classroom issues are addressed, and numerous recommendations are made for NAEP's improvement. These papers appear at an important juncture, since the 106th Congress must reauthorize NAEP (and NAGB). Policymakers involved in that process should read these analyses carefully. Others concerned about the future of NAEP should, too.

Get your copy of *Standards Count* by writing the Institute for Educational Leadership at 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036, by phoning 202-822-8405 ext. 105, by faxing 202-872-4050 or by emailing iel@iel.org. The papers are free. • *MJP*

Teacher Quality

The Numbers Game: Ensuring Quantity and Quality in the Teaching Work Force

This report from the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) strikes a cautious tone somewhere between that of teachers' unions (who think our teaching force is basically fine, thank you very much) and John Silber (who seems inclined to fire most of the teaching force in Massachusetts).

The report begins with an important observation: the talk about an impending teacher shortage has frightened people away from taking steps to improve teaching quality. However, the real problem, the study group stresses, is not absolute shortages but quality and distribution: we don't have enough good teachers and the best of those we have don't want to teach in the places that need them most. The study group urges state boards of education to remedy this situation by developing a standards-based system of teacher preparation and recruiting more promising teacher candidates to the field.

The importance of understanding teacher preparation to include more than traditional teacher training is stressed, but this is understood to mean things like more time in preparation programs (beyond a bachelor's degree). Holding teacher candidates to knowledge and performance standards rather than rigid course and degree requirements is an excellent recommendation, though the study group makes it clear that it doesn't think scores on written tests are a very good gauge of teacher fitness. NASBE embraces some important concepts in this report but seems to back off from recommendations that would really rock the boat. Copies may be obtained for $14 by writing NASBE Publications, 1012 Cameron Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, by phoning 800-368-5023, or by surfing to www.nasbe.org. •*MBK*

The Essential Profession

Recruiting New Teachers here presents the results of its recent survey of public attitudes toward teaching, educational opportunity, and school reform. They found that, while Americans are more concerned about teacher quality than curriculum and discipline, they are less concerned about teacher quality than about student drug use and school violence. Nine out of ten Americans did respond that the presence of a qualified teacher in the classroom was the most significant factor contributing to higher student achievement.

The report also looks into public perceptions and feelings about teacher salaries, workloads, and school reform strategies. The authors suggest that teacher quality should become the leading movement in school reform, ahead of other ideas like vouchers and charter schools. (Considering that Recruiting New Teachers is an organization that works to raise esteem for the teaching profession and improve teacher recruitment strategies, this is all fairly predictable.) But the main point is well-taken: Americans want high-quality teachers.

Get your copy of *The Essential Profession* by writing Recruiting New Teachers at 385 Concord Ave., Belmont, MA 02478, calling 617-489-6000,

or faxing 617-489-6005. You can also download the report from their website at www.rnt.org. •*SMF*

Alternative Teacher Certification: A State-by-State Analysis, 1998-99

Emily Feistritzer and David Chester of the National Center for Education Information provide a 426-page volume that serves as an extensive compendium of information about the numerous alternative certification programs in operation throughout the nation.

Information is included on an array of topics: the evolution of alternative certification, current teacher licensing practices, the supply and demand projections that have so many policymakers worried, and the results of selected alternative certification programs. Model state programs are described and analyzed. 'Troops to Teachers,' a national program designed to bring former military personnel into public education classrooms, is also profiled. The bulk of the report is a state-by-state breakdown of programs.

The report costs a steep $95, plus $4 for shipping and handling. If you're interested in teacher quality in general or alternative certification in particular, the outlay is worth it. To order, write the National Center for Education Information at 4401A Connecticut Ave., NW, #212, Washington, DC 20008, call 202-362-3444, fax 202-362-3493, or email nceicef@aol.com. •*SMF*

Higher Education

College Remediation: What It Is, What It Costs, What's At Stake

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) contends that remediation is not only necessary but a core function of higher education and that eliminating remedial programs would be unfair since there are no consistent standards about what constitutes college level work. They also argue that the costs of remediation are minimal and a good investment for society. The IHEP hopes to encourage policy research on remedial education that looks at what works, for whom, and at what cost so that successful programs can be replicated by other institutions.

This polemic hopes to save remedial education from the chopping block. We weren't persuaded, especially by their calls to "save" remedial education on four-year campuses.

But decide for yourself: Obtain a free copy by writing the Institute for Higher Education Policy at 1320 19th St., NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036, calling 202-861-8223, faxing 202-861-9307, or emailing institute@ihep.com. You can also download it on their website at www.ihep.com. •*SMF*

Are Pennsylvania's Students Receiving the Fundamentals of a College Education?

What does a college diploma mean these days? Has the bearer received a quality education? The Commonwealth Foundation and the Pennsylvania Association of Scholars took a close look at the core curriculum (or general education) requirements of the 14 state-funded universities in the Keystone State to determine whether the schools are ensuring that their students possess a sound liberal education before graduating them. The short answer: they are not.

While all of the universities included in the study have general education requirements designed to provide a broad base of knowledge, the requirements are not very rigorous. For example, only four schools require the study of American and/or Western civilization, and the courses that can be used to satisfy such requirements are often faddish or hyper-specialized. A student at Bloomsburg University, for example, can fulfill all her general education requirements without taking a single course in literature, history, philosophy, fine arts, foreign languages or mathematics. There is a Humanities requirement but this can be satisfied by courses in Jewelry Making, History of Film, Crafts and Interpersonal Communication. Such a courseload would be funny if it weren't so sad: a student investing in such a mediocre curriculum almost surely dooms herself to a mediocre career as well.

To obtain a free copy, contact the Commonwealth Foundation at 717-671-1901 (phone) or 717-671-1905 (fax). •*JRP*

Etc.

Changing Federal Strategies for Supporting Educational Research, Development and Statistics

In reauthorizing the research unit (OERI) of the U.S. Department of Education in 1994, Congress created a new body to set policy for it. The National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board (NERPPB) then commissioned University of Michigan historian Maris Vinovskis to write a history of federal involvement in education research. Dr. Vinovskis has done so and the result warrants the attention of everyone seriously interested in education research and in federal education policy. It is not, on the whole, a happy story, but it's deeply enlightening and also timely, inasmuch as OERI is about due for another authorization cycle on Capitol Hill.

For a free copy of this 115 page report, write the NERPPB, U.S. Department of Education, 80 F Street NW, Suite 100, Washington, DC 20208, telephone 202-208-0692 (or contact Mary Grace Lucier at 202-219-2253), fax 202-219-1528, email nerppb.ed.gov or surf to www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/NERPPB/. •*CEFjr*

The Real Story Behind 'Paycheck Protection.'

Angered by California's Proposition 226, the so-called 'paycheck protection' initiative, the National Education Association uses 143 pages to attack the vast 'conservative network' that, in the NEA's paranoid world, is responsible for such initiatives. This report lists and describes key 'far right' organizations and leaders, hoping to link funders of Proposition 226 with supporters of school vouchers and suchlike. In the NEA's opinion, these groups are working together on their anti-worker and anti-public education agendas.

To consider this a piece of scholarship would be laughable. And though we were left off the list, we were glad to receive a ready resource guide for locating other organizations interested in tough-minded school reform. If you are truly compelled to order the report and see for yourself, write the NEA at 1201 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-3290 or call them at (202) 833-4000. The cost of the report is $5.00, but we suggest you save your money for something worthwhile. •*SMF*

The Course of True Love: Marriage in High School Textbooks

The Institute for American Values has produced this report to serve as a companion to last year's look at marriage in college textbooks, *Closed Hearts, Closed Minds: The Textbook Story of Marriage.*

Generally, researchers found that high school health textbooks do a better job teaching about marriage than those used at the college level. For the most part, high school books show respect for marriage and parenthood, especially in emphasizing that both require maturity and a solid understanding of what these relationships truly mean. Unfortunately, the report found that the content in these books is vacuous and anti-intellectual.

The Course of True Love can only be obtained through the mail by writing the Institute for American Values, 1841 Broadway, Suite 211, New York, NY 10023. Each copy costs $7.00, prepaid. For further questions, call them at (212) 246-3942. •*SMF*

Network Notes are written by Chester E. Finn, Jr., Susan M. Flora, Marci B. Kanstoroom, Michael J. Petrilli, John R. Phillips, and Carlene Wilson.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

The Front Lines

As June Kronholz reports in her *Wall Street Journal* article, "In Many Races, the Magic Word was Education," the 1998 elections proved that talking about—and offering to reform, and spending money on—education is one way to voters' hearts. Senator John Kerry, a Democrat from Massachusetts, has recognized this fact and is already weaving reform ideas into his speeches to test the presidential campaign waters. However, Kerry is not taking the conventional Democratic path, as evidenced by the *New Republic* article "Schoolyard Tussle" by Dana Millbank. Many of the ideas he's promoting, including charter schools, ending teacher tenure, and a measure of school choice, are an affront to the teacher unions, whose support he has counted on in the past. Mere rhetoric or a shift in the political landscape? We shall see.

Should schools attempt "comprehensive" reform or focus on a few fundamentals, such as reading? In his *Atlantic Monthly* piece "Ready, READ!," Nicholas Lemann favors comprehensive whole-school designs, with a special investigation of the reading-intensive Success for All program. Lemann is convinced that forcing low-performing schools to adopt such school-wide models would make smart policy. On the other hand, John J. DiIulio, Jr., in his *Weekly Standard* article "My School Choice: Literacy First," favors programs that place literacy ahead of other reforms.

Wouldn't it be nice if educational research could settle dilemmas like this one? Certainly medical research has allowed doctors to know which treatment to prescribe for sick patients. Why don't educators know what to do with sick schools? That's the point of Diane Ravitch's insightful *Education Week* commentary, "What if Research Really Mattered?"

Next, we serve up another gem from Ravitch, "Student Performance," from the *Brookings Review*. Ravitch suggests a comprehensive overhaul of federal education policy, and makes some specific recommendations about how to improve the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which is up for reauthorization this Congress.

Used to be, American schools were faulted for weak academic achievement but lauded for the *quantity* of education they provide. No more. Ethan Bronner, in his *New York Times* article, "Long a Leader, U.S. Now Lags in High School Graduate Rate," gives the latest bad news: other industrialized nations have caught up and surpassed American graduation rates. Now, more Americans fail to graduate than their agemates in other lands, and those that do graduate lack the skills and knowledge to be competitive.

Our last two articles in this section focus on results from two public opinion surveys about education. "Standards and Testing—For Students and Teachers—Draw Strong Support in New Survey," a press release from Mass Insight Education and Research Institute (MERI), provides the results of their poll on attitudes toward statewide standards and testing. "Most Back Vouchers" by Lynn Hulsey of the *Dayton Daily News*, summarizes key findings of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation's Summer '98 survey of Dayton-area parents and community members, which showed overwhelming support for vouchers and charter schools, among other reform strategies. It seems that radical school reform isn't so radical anymore.

SMF

The Wall Street Journal, November 5, 1998

In Many Races, The Magic Word Was Education

By June Kronholz
Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal

WASHINGTON—Many voters had a new message this year: It's education, stupid.

Prodded by polls that show education is one of Americans' top two concerns, this year's candidates from both parties campaigned for better schools as never before. Mary Elizabeth Teasley, government-relations director for the National Education Association, says campaign ads began in August with vague promises of better schools but quickly took on focus—calling for new classroom construction, smaller class size and better teacher training.

In many states, education was merely an underlying theme. But in a plentiful number of tight races, education—the problem everyone talks about, but no one ever wanted to deal with—emerged as a decisive issue.

"People voted education," says Chester Finn, an education analyst at the conservative Hudson Institute. And while they sent complicated signals on a whole backpack of issues, voters clearly thought about their schools more this election than they have in years.

Indeed, in a Los Angeles Times exit poll, 56% of those who voted for winning California gubernatorial candidate Gray Davis listed education as the most important issue in deciding their vote, 2½ times as many as those who said taxes were their greatest concern.

With the economy good, crime down and a population that is generally content, pollsters are finding, Americans have time to reflect on long-neglected social problems—such as education. Moreover, with the job market demanding better-educated workers, baby-boomer voters in particular are fretting over how competitive their children will be.

Education turned out to be a pivotal issue in governors' races in South Carolina and Alabama where winning Democratic candidates proposed a lottery to pay for school improvements, and conservative Republicans opposed it. Indeed, test scores that showed both states trailing the country proved an open wound for Republican incumbents in both states. "People couldn't see results," says Gerrit Westervelt, of the Education Commission of the States, which tracks state education trends.

Likewise, in Iowa, a dependably Republican state, a Democratic challenger who talked education defeated a GOP incumbent who talked about tax cuts. "There were more education folks than tax-cut folks," says Mr. Westervelt.

But while there was plenty of attention on education, the candidates had vastly different ideas on how to fix the schools. Vouchers were a clear loser in most states, but an idea that Florida's new governor, Jeb Bush, flirted with successfully throughout the campaign. Vouchers, a pet Republican theme, give states tax support for children in private schools.

Colorado voters by almost a 2-to-1 margin, defeated a measure that would have allowed tax credits for tuition to private and religious schools. The teachers' unions spent about $260,000 in ads in the final week of the campaign to defeat the plan, says Dane Waters of the Initiative and Referendum Institute, which tracks those measures.

Likewise, Republican voucher proponents running for House seats in Oregon, New Mexico and Kansas—two of them incumbents—were soundly defeated by Democrats who proposed more mainstream solutions to improve public schools, including smaller classes. In California, Republican gubernatorial candidate Dan Lundgren, a voucher proponent, met the same voter wariness.

But Florida's Mr. Bush slightly changed the discussion, talking about competition and free markets instead of vouchers, and appealed to a state with soaring school enrollment. Likewise, three governors known for challenging the status quo in their states won easy victories, although on issues far broader than just education. Wisconsin's Tommy Thompson launched the nation's first public-funded voucher program in Milwaukee in 1991. George W. Bush in Texas and Michigan's John Engler lead other governors in demanding greater accountability from their schools, while keeping budgets in check.

More money for the schools, a pet Democratic theme, also had mixed results. By a 2-to-1 margin, California voters defeated Proposition 8, which would have created a fund to reduce class size, and also called for measures to test and recertify teachers. But by the same margin, they approved $9.2 billion for school construction.

Colorado voters, after rejecting private-school tax credits, which opponents say would take money from public schools, defeated a measure that would have used $500 million in surplus revenue for school construction and higher education. Instead, they wanted tax refunds.

South Dakota voters, meanwhile, defeated by a 5-to-1 margin a measure that would have prohibited property-tax revenue from being used to fund schools. The proposal offered no alternative for funding, a vote perhaps as easy to figure as dumbed-down math.

While most votes reflected local interests, the Democrats' education program—smaller classes, school modernization, teacher development—found a more receptive audience than the Republican plan of tax credits and vouchers. Democratic strategists predicted that the high voter interest in education would lead to big pushes in Congress for more money for the schools—and that Republicans would sign on for fear of voter wrath if they didn't.

Voters showed themselves just as divided on how to fix the schools as the politicians. "They flew the flag of education," says the Hudson Institute's Mr. Finn, "but they flew it in different ways."

The New Republic, December 14, 1998

SCHOOLYARD TUSSLE

By Dana Milbank

BOSTON

Senator John Kerry displays a glass-encased baseball card in his office featuring his likeness where a slugger's should appear. The card, an award from the National Education Association, proclaims Kerry a member of the union's "Education All-Star Team." In his 14 years in the Senate, Kerry has consistently gone to bat for the NEA, earning a perfect 100 percent in its most recent rating. He didn't vote a single time against the American Federation of Teachers, either, according to that union's latest scoring. Volunteers from the teachers' unions, in return, proved crucial in Kerry's 1996 reelection fight.

All of which makes John Kerry's latest crusade rather puzzling. In twin speeches delivered recently in Boston and Washington, Kerry ostentatiously defied these same teachers' unions, declaring that "we must end teacher tenure as we know it" and proposing "to make every public school in this country essentially a charter school"—in other words, a school free from most of the bureaucratic controls on regular public schools. He decried the "bloated bureaucracy" and "stagnant administration" of schools and demanded higher teaching standards and streamlined certification rules. "Those going into teaching have the lowest SAT and ACT scores of any profession in the United States," he lamented.

Publicly, union officials reacted to Kerry's speech with talk of "mixed feelings." Privately, they groused about Kerry's "teacher-bashing." One NEA official told *The Boston Globe* after Kerry's first speech that "we are not pleased with his swipes at teachers' unions." But Kerry, undaunted, told me in an interview that he'd even approve of government-funded vouchers—good for tuition in any accredited private school—as part of an overall education reform, if that's what it took to make America's schools better.

Just what is John Kerry up to? "I think he's running for president, that's what," says AFT President Sandra Feldman. She's got a point there. Kerry, his aides and confidantes say, used the education speeches as the informal launch of his 2000 presidential campaign. "It's important to make it a component of a national race," affirms Kerry, who hasn't yet committed himself to a run. "It's a point I'd like to take to the country."

To be sure, John Kerry is not likely to ride this issue to the White House. Barring some bizarre twist, he will not be our next president, and he will not be the Democratic nominee—even if he spends a bit of his wife Teresa Heinz's colossal fortune and makes Vice President Gore sweat. He lacks anything near the infrastructure, name recognition, and popularity of the front-runner; his image, to the extent he has one, is that of a Northeastern liberal. Most likely, Kerry is angling for the higher visibility that comes with a presidential run and maybe consideration as vice president or secretary of state.

But, by building his campaign around education, Kerry may well provoke a long-overdue debate over the issue within the Democratic Party. Americans are clearly angry about the state of public schools. And, if the Democrats do not seize the initiative, Republicans may well prevail with a large, uncontrolled rush to vouchers. "If we don't come up with real answers for what ails our schools," Kerry declared in his Boston speech, "then our defense of public schools will become the defeat of the public schools." About this, surely, he is exactly right.

The new South Boston Harbor Academy Charter School has a physical presence not quite befitting its lofty name. It sits across the street from a power plant and shares an alley with a corrugated-metal warehouse. The school building itself says "COMPUTER PRODUCTS POWER CONVERSION"; inside, a hand-lettered, cardboard sign directs visitors to the second floor. A young man, not too long out of school himself, is at the top of the stairs. "I'm the principal," says Brett Peiser, 30 years old. Peiser isn't the only unusual thing here. Like most charter schools, this one has smaller classes (about 20 students per class) and longer days (eight hours a day) than regular public schools. With no union to represent them, the teachers work longer hours and have no tenure protections. But they get a slightly higher wage than starting teachers elsewhere, and they are eligible for merit bonuses. The union says that's no bargain, but apparently a lot of teachers disagree: the school had 700 applicants for eight teaching positions before it opened.

The person in charge of the school is State Senator Stephen Lynch, whose South Boston district is one of the poorest in the state. Lynch has deep union roots: for 18 years he toiled as an ironworker, eventually becoming

president of his union's 2,000-member Boston local. A few years ago, this hard-bitten Democrat got himself elected to the state legislature and promptly won the AFL-CIO's "legislator of the year" award. But now, as chairman of the South Boston charter school—and one of the legislature's fiercest advocates for charters—he has become the nemesis of the teachers' unions.

He vows to push for an expansion of charters, as well as for government-funded vouchers. "When you know you're absolutely right about something, that other stuff is secondary," he says from his makeshift office. "I have a great respect for the teachers' unions, but there's far too much at stake." Lynch says other Democrats, driven by the wretched state of public schools, are joining his insurgency. "Ideas that were taboo at one time now have a fighting chance," he says.

Indeed, the state's Democrat-dominated legislature, which in 1995 came within a couple of votes of killing charter schools, now gives them overwhelming support. The state's governor, Republican Paul Cellucci, is likely to attempt a further expansion of charters, plus another assault on the state's tenure law, which has already been weakened. Cellucci also wants to loosen the control unions and local districts have over some charter schools. And he may succeed, for even some Democrats have found it's not fatal to take on the teachers' unions here. Three years ago, Thomas Finneran described members of the Massachusetts Teachers Association as "selfish pigs." Today he's speaker of the state House.

The teachers' unions, meanwhile, have their backs to the wall. In April, 59 percent of teaching candidates flunked a new statewide test for prospective teachers. In July, 47 percent failed. Cellucci responded with a proposal not just to test new teachers for competency but to test all teachers every five years, decertifying those who flunk twice. He made it an issue in his successful gubernatorial campaign this fall. And, in a poll cited in *The Boston Globe*, 73 percent of his constituents supported Cellucci's proposal.

"Not only are our teachers alarmed, they're completely demoralized by this," said Massachusetts Teachers Association President Stephen Gorrie when I asked him about the plan. Gorrie, for his part, argued that the union is "in the forefront" of reform, and he says he's all for higher teaching standards: "We view education reform as a huge opportunity." Politicians, he added, "still come courting our endorsement." But Gorrie conceded that several Democrats had broken ranks with the unions. "The political landscape has changed," he said. "They feel they can run a bit on the public perceptions."

And public perceptions increasingly favor radical education reforms. A group of Massachusetts community activists, Democrats mostly, has formed the Citizens United for Charter Schools. They hired a lobbyist and make grants to groups that start charter schools. A ballot initiative to institute vouchers is afoot, though state constitutional hurdles will stop it from becoming a serious possibility for years. Boston's black leaders remain fiercely loyal to the public schools, but there are cracks in the African American community. Judy Burnette, a black former teacher, runs the United in Spirit Coalition in Roxbury, supporting charters and vouchers. Burnette wants to open her own charter school in the near future.

John Kerry was well aware of the groundswell for education reform in his home state before he gambled on the issue this year. And, while it might seem odd to make schools the centerpiece of a presidential campaign—states make most of the big policy decisions, and only seven percent of education funding comes from the federal government—the fact that such a notoriously cautious (some would even say opportunistic) politician as Kerry embraces the cause tells you that it might indeed be a potent issue.

Kerry's most important idea, which he has borrowed from centrist groups like the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), is to turn all public schools into charter schools. He envisions thousands of public schools competing fiercely for students and envisions the competition pushing all schools to get better. "Let's have a bold experiment," he says.

The strongest argument against charter schools is that they skim off the best students, or at least the students with the most involved parents, leaving the rest of the public schools worse than before. That may be so. But the trouble is that the status quo forces all children to suffer rather than letting a few get ahead—to the point where parents want to opt out of the system altogether, a fact Kerry is quick to note. And, while critics say it's far too early to say definitively whether charter schools work at all, there are at least some encouraging signs. A Department of Education study this year found that charter schools had a racial and ethnic mix similar to regular public schools. And parental demand is huge: more than 70 percent of charter schools had more applicants than they could accommodate. There are now 1,129 charter schools in operation, according to the Center for Education Reform, with another 157 approved to open.

The fact that charter schools are so popular also explains the other, more calculating, rationale for expanding them—it may be the only way to avoid a wholesale switch to vouchers. A Gallup poll released in September found that Americans, by 51 percent to 45 percent, favor allowing parents to send children to "any public, private, or church-related school" with government paying "all or part of the tuition." Even in the heavily Democratic District of Columbia, a *Washington Post* poll found that 56 percent of residents favor vouchers for low-income students. In June, businessmen Ted Forstmann and John Walton pledged $100 million for what is essentially a privately funded voucher program to send poor students to private schools; their board includes such Democratic luminaries as Senators John Breaux and Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Representative Charles Rangel.

The trouble with vouchers, as Kerry and other Democrats will tell you, is that they lack accountability; the

government can't enforce standards at the private schools that get its money. Charter schools, by contrast, operate under contracts with state or local government and thus remain accountable to the government that licenses them. A vast expansion of charter schools, therefore, is less dangerous—but potentially just as rewarding—as a headlong leap into vouchers. "If you do the things I'm proposing, you won't be arguing about vouchers," says Kerry.

In Washington, the education showdown will likely begin next year, in the form of the reauthorization in Congress of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Some Republicans would like to replace Title I—a huge program for educating the poor—with a voucher program or direct grant to the states to allow them to establish voucher programs. They may well succeed unless Democrats present an alternative.

The Kerry plan looks like such an alternative. In addition to expanding charter schools, it would end "social promotion" for underperforming children. It would also end tenure and introduce national educational standards and alternative certification (to allow those with liberal arts degrees, and not just teaching degrees, to teach). Kerry also favors such Democratic (and union) favorites as increased spending for infrastructure and smaller classes but minces no words about his intentions. "I'm for tough love here, folks," Kerry says. "It's time to come in and kick some butts. Democrats can't be viewed as somehow protecting these practices. You can't do this in some loosey-goosey, half-assed way."

Kerry can count on the support of centrist organizations like the DLC. The Clinton administration is also friendly to the idea of expanding charter schools, and it endorses many of the other reforms. The problem, as always, is with the education establishment—and particularly with the unions.

On the one hand, the leaders of both major teachers' unions say they want to put their organizations in the vanguard of reform. NEA chief Bob Chase talks about the "new unionism," an end to the industrial model of conflict; AFT's Feldman calls it "one of the great frustrations of my life" that the union is portrayed as opposing alternative teacher certification and alternatives to tenure. Last year, for example, the NEA, hoping to shed its obstructionist image, even commissioned a report by some image consultants, The Kamber Group. The report suggested "co-opting the other side's turf so the NEA can direct reform discussions rather than having them dictated to it." The Kamber report was very specific, calling for "at least two or three substantive measures the NEA should adopt, or call for, to improve public schools.... The campaign should be launched in a speech by President Chase in which he acknowledges the crisis, says some things for their shock value to open up the audience's minds (e.g., there are bad teachers and our job is to make them good or show the way to another career), and then details the Association's substantive programs to improve public schools."

Chase followed the script to the letter. A few weeks later, he appeared at the National Press Club. "We must revitalize our public schools from within, or they will be dismantled from without," he declared. "I must publicly speak some rather blunt truths.... There are indeed some bad teachers in America's schools. And it is our job as a union to improve those teachers or, that failing, to get them out of the classroom."

But it's not clear how much of this talk is just talk. Take the just-enacted Charter School Expansion Act, which expands funding and incentives to states to open charter schools. Both the AFT and the NEA opposed the measure in the House. When the measure, sponsored by Indiana Democrat Tim Roemer, passed with significant Democratic support, the unions concentrated their efforts on the Senate, winning some small concessions.

In the last days of the session, when it came to a vote, the unions tried to get a senator to place a "hold" on it—which would have killed the measure. But not one Democrat would do their bidding, and the measure passed by unanimous consent. Episodes like these are one reason that Connecticut Democrat Joseph Lieberman, who sponsored the charter legislation in the Senate, says he sees the makings of a revolt against the unions and the rest of the education establishment. "Things are moving in that direction," he says. "We just all have to get together and charge the wall."

To be sure, there are some serious reformers within the union ranks. Adam Urbanski, for example, the president of the Rochester Teachers Association and a member of the AFT's executive council, has formed the Teacher Union Reform Network, devoted to "injecting market dynamics into public education." Urbanski talks about giving parents a choice of any public school, and he favors incentive pay and replacing tenure with a due process dismissal system. Urbanski, however, is unusual. Some say the problem is the state chapters, which resist the progressive thinking of the national leaders. Some think the problem is the NEA; others say it's the AFT. They may all be right.

But the resistance, whatever its source, is becoming less relevant. Last session, on a student savings-account measure that would have helped parents save for private schools, Lieberman almost mustered enough Democratic Senate votes to override President Clinton's veto. A surprising number of Democrats in the Senate, including Moynihan, Mary Landrieu, Joseph Biden, Bob Graham, Robert Torricelli, and Dianne Feinstein, support various heretical education reforms. Virtually no senator voices outright opposition to charter schools. "More Democrats are looking at more options that Democrats didn't look at before," says a White House official. The teachers' unions "realize things could slip away from them." Adds Jeanne Allen, president of the Center for Education Reform, which backs vouchers and charter schools: "People have come to realize these opponents are a paper tiger."

Ironically, another group of the Democrat faithful—urban minorities—is fueling this backlash. Howard

Fuller, a former superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools, has become an outspoken champion of the city's voucher program, one of only two in the country. (The U.S. Supreme Court, in a setback to teachers' unions, this month let the Wisconsin voucher program stand.) Hugh Price, head of the National Urban League, warned in a 1997 speech that parents would "shop elsewhere" if public schools continued to fail. "We Urban Leaguers believe passionately in public education," he said. "But make no mistake. We love our children even more." Other longtime members of the education establishment have come to the same conclusion: this June, Arthur Levine, president of the Columbia University Teachers College, wrote an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* to say that he, too, was "reluctantly" supporting vouchers for poor students.

While Kerry has been a beneficiary of teachers' union support in the past, he seems unafraid of their wrath. One reason is that he's got his own money to spend on a presidential campaign. (He doesn't accept PAC money anyway.) Another is that confronting the teachers' unions allows Kerry to separate himself from the front-runner, Al Gore, a union ally who has taken to the stump to call vouchers "an illusion wrapped in an insult."

Chase and Feldman try to put the best gloss on this, minimizing their differences with the senator. "I don't necessarily think some of the things he's been saying should be interpreted the way everyone's been interpreting them," says Chase. Feldman agrees: "We disagree with some things, but they're not life-and-death issues." In fact, Kerry met with union officials before his big speeches and tried to pacify them. When Feldman balked at Kerry's idea of making "every school a charter school," Kerry added more words about accountability and high standards.

Union officials also believe that Kerry's policies aren't really as tough as his rhetoric. Though he likes charter schools, they say, he favors the Horace Mann version in Massachusetts, which has collective bargaining, not the Commonwealth charter schools, which are nonunion and sometimes run by for-profit companies. He wants tenure reform, they acknowledge, but he's satisfied with Massachusetts's watered-down tenure law. And, they believe, he remains opposed to vouchers. Conservative education activists offer the same opinion of Kerry: "Rhetoric has value, but, on the details, he loses me," says James Peyser, head of the Pioneer Institute, a think tank in Boston, and a member of the state's Board of Education. "I don't think John Kerry really wants to challenge the big interests of the unions."

But, while it's certainly true that Kerry's proposals aren't as audacious as his rhetoric, the mere fact that he puts out such rhetoric marks a significant milestone in the party's evolution, if not his own. Does Kerry support the Commonwealth schools, which unions hate? "Absolutely." Does he care if charter schools are run by for-profit companies? "Doesn't matter." Has tenure been weakened enough in Massachusetts? "They need to go a little further, and I've said that," he replies. "I know there are teachers who can't be fired, and I have to say it." And what about vouchers? "Clearly it could be part of a mix if you're embracing other reforms," says Kerry, who calls his vote against vouchers for the District of Columbia "very, very hard."

The DLC, which never considered Kerry one of its own, is impressed. One DLC official calls Kerry's plan "the most radical statement of support for charter schools I've heard from any politician in either party." Kerry says he's heard some encouragement from Republicans, too. He also sweetened the tougher parts of his legislation with more spending for infrastructure and teacher salaries. "The unions," Kerry says, "are prepared to sit down at the table if they're met by people who aren't trying to destroy them."

They'd better get to the table quickly, though, because reform will come, with or without them. If you have any doubt, a few minutes at the Neighborhood House Charter School in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood will dispel it. The school was started in 1995 by a group of angry parents. Now it borrows space in a vacant wing of a Catholic school. While public schools are overcrowded, Neighborhood House has 18 students and *two* teachers in each class. It saves money by having only two full-time administrators, and its nonunion teachers, who don't have tenure, work a longer school day and school year. The school also raises a third of its budget from private contributions. And, though the teachers' unions may hate the idea, the local construction trade unions in Dorchester refurbished an old building to give the school expansion room, pro bono.

Before Neighborhood House will admit a student—even though half of its students live in poverty, it has ten applicants for every spot, better than many Ivy League colleges—parents must sign a "family learning contract." This commits parents to attend three conferences a year, to do eight hours of volunteer work at the school, and to give their children a quiet place for homework. A parent coordinator makes home visits, and, if the parents don't honor the bargain, their kids are gone. "We've turned a lot of parents around," says Kristen McCormack, one of the parents who founded Neighborhood House.

McCormack is a Democrat from Dorchester who founded the Boston Food Bank before joining the charter-school movement. She decided to start the school when she saw children in her neighborhood failing in school "through no fault of their own," because the public schools felt "no sense of urgency" to reform. So she pulled her kids out of school and put them in Neighborhood House. "Every school commissioner says this is going to be a ten-year process," she says. "In ten years, my kids are going to be out of the system. I can't wait that long." It's a sentiment echoing across the land—and Democrats like John Kerry are beginning to hear it. In McCormack, the teachers' unions and the education establishment have encountered someone even more powerful than they are: an angry parent. •

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"Ready, READ!"

by NICHOLAS LEMANN

A new solution to the problem of failing public schools is emerging: takeover by outside authorities, who prescribe a standardized, field-tested curriculum. This runs counter to our long-standing tradition of autonomy for local schools and teachers, but it works

MOST discussion of public education in the United States begins with the premise that big, government-run school systems no longer work. The way to provide a good education to all children, especially poor children, is to turn over control of public schools to smaller, more local, and possibly private operators—to decentralize authority. At the center of the debate is a contest between two ideas: vouchers and charter schools. Vouchers are checks from the government that are issued to parents and earmarked for education; they are redeemable at both private and public schools. Charter schools are new public schools operated by independent groups. "We must . . . bring more choice and competition into public education," President Bill Clinton said last year, in calling for the establishment of 3,000 charter schools. Both ideas address the problems in public education by walking away from them.

The rhetoric of failure is simply wrong. There are 87,000 public schools in this country, with 45 million students—a sixth of the U.S. population. Enrollment is increasing rapidly. The best measure of public schools' performance, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, has shown modest but steady overall gains since it was first administered, in 1970. One has to belong to the small but disproportionately influential subculture that interacts only with private education to believe that public education—rather than specific public schools—has failed. The total enrollment in private, nonsectarian schools where the annual tuition is more than $5,000 is about 400,000—less than one percent of public school enrollment. Catholic-school enrollment is 2.5 million. Public education is by far the largest and most important function performed by government in this country. In no way is it in systemic crisis.

In the public schools that can fairly be described as having failed, most of which are in poor urban neighborhoods, what is actually taking place is a great and largely unremarked centralization of authority. The trend is diffuse, and its precise dimensions are difficult to limn. In at least a thousand American public schools, it is safe to say, outside control has replaced local autonomy during the 1990s. This has affected many more schools and students than has the devolution of authority through voucher programs or charter schools.

During the 1980s many states began imposing measurements of performance on their public schools, usually in the form of obligatory standardized tests in reading and math. (Bill Clinton first gained national attention by doing this in Arkansas.) In this decade, when individual schools or entire districts have persistently turned in poor scores on these tests, outside authorities have often moved in. The school systems of Chicago, Hartford, Cleveland, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and three cities in New Jersey, among other places, are no longer under the control of the municipal school superintendent. The Pennsylvania legislature is threatening to take over Philadelphia's system. In other cities, such as San Francisco and San Antonio, the school superintendent has imposed "reconstitution" on the worst-performing schools, meaning that the entire staff has been required to reapply for employment and the school has been "redesigned."

In many of these cases, after the change in authority the schools have adopted one of about a dozen national school designs that cover such areas as governance, relations with parents and the neighborhood, teaching techniques, and, especially, curriculum. Many schools that have not been taken over or reconstituted (for example, dozens of schools in Memphis and Miami) are also using these "whole school" designs. Of the three most popular—Success for All, Accelerated Schools, and the School Development Program, all designed by university professors—the first two have each been adopted by more than a thousand schools across the country, and the third by 700.

The outline emerges of a future in which schools that aren't doing their job will lose their independence and will have to adopt a standard mode of operation that has demonstrated good results. This is not what most people think of as the direction in which public education is moving. Even Clinton's constant calls for national education standards

Illustrations by José Cruz

mean the setting of goals for what all students should know, not dictating the day-to-day operations of schools. If failure in the public schools is resulting not in decentralization but in the imposition of a template, then we should know it—and think about whether this is a good idea.

American public schools have never been as local as politicians claim to want them to be. In a country as big as ours it would be impractical to leave education entirely in the hands of 14,800 school boards that operate independently. So we have a strange hybrid: a system rhetorically committed to decentralization but in fact centralized in a patchwork, undeliberate way. We have national standardized tests, national teachers' unions, national textbook publishers, and national laws, regulations, and funding programs for schools. No school is free of their influence. But they influence most schools in a haphazard fashion.

The great majority of public schools muddle along fairly successfully. It is students at bad public schools who are the main losers in the patchwork system, and a consistent national standard for how to operate bad schools ought to be considered with their interests in mind.

RECENTRALIZING AUTHORITY

At the end of the nineteenth century New York City, cobbled together out of smaller cities and towns, created the country's biggest centralized public school system. In 1969, following a long, famous, resonant battle, New York dropped centralization in favor of a policy of "community control" and created thirty-two local school boards. This was not an unqualified success, and the move back toward centralization began. In 1989 the New York State commissioner of education created a new status, called "registration review," for persistently low-performing schools, most of which were in poor sections of New York City. The schools were under a threat of having their state registration revoked and being shut down. In 1996 the state legislature essentially rescinded community control, by giving the chancellor of New York City's schools the power to fire principals and school-board superintendents. (Chicago's school system went through much the same cycle, but faster: dramatically decentralized in 1988, recentralized in 1995.) The state commissioner kept up the saber-rattling, and in 1996 New York City's new chancellor, Rudy Crew, took direct control of nine of the worst registration-review schools—six elementary and three middle schools—in the hope of turning them around.

Fifteen percent of the registration-review schools in New York State were in a single school district—Community School District Nine, in the Bronx, the most consistently problematic school district in New York City. Its test scores have always been low, its board has twice been disbanded after the discovery of job-selling and kickback schemes, and in the most notorious incident a school principal was arrested for possession of crack cocaine.

If you drive around District Nine, which is in the collection of neighborhoods known to the outside world as the South Bronx (although it is actually in the West Bronx), you can see how the school system could have become so bad. The neighborhoods are, of course, largely poor and nonwhite, and remote from the mainstream of city life. What is really striking about them, though, is that the schools in them are the biggest buildings. Three- and four-story factory-style brick palaces, built before the Second World War, they tower over the landscape like cathedrals in medieval villages. In its heyday District Nine was a white ethnic working-class residential area; in the late 1960s and 1970s it was a burned-out, abandoned, desperately poor, all-minority area. Today it has been substantially rebuilt and repopulated with black and Hispanic immigrants. Public schools are still where the money and jobs are: the driving force of this school district has long been political patronage, not education.

The nine schools Crew took over are collectively referred to as "the Chancellor's District"; they have been operating separately for two full school years. At the beginning of the first year Crew replaced the principals of all nine schools. At the end of that year three of the schools had actually gotten worse on the crucial measure of reading scores, and only three had improved substantially. Crew replaced four of the nine new principals, and he adopted the Success for All reading program. This time the reading scores at all nine schools (and at three other schools that had been added to the district) rose significantly.

Measured by test scores, one of the worst schools in the Chancellor's District is Public School 63, in the Bronx. We'll stop there for a moment before moving on to the dramatically improved Public School 114, a short distance away. It is helpful to have a sense of what a failed school is really like.

ONE FAD ON TOP OF ANOTHER

Two images of bad inner-city schools prevail in the wider culture: the out-of-control violent school, where weapon-toting gang members rule and teachers cower; and the underfunded school with overcrowded classrooms, peeling paint, leaking pipes, and broken heating. P.S. 63 is neither of these. To be sure, it has a lot of disciplinary problems, but it is only an elementary school. It is not overcrowded, because the surrounding neighborhood, Morrisania, hasn't been part of the revival of the Bronx and is still depopulated. Every day 240 students are bused in from other parts of the Bronx, and the average class size is twenty-three. Chancellor's District schools get extra money, so at the moment an insufficient budget is not P.S. 63's No. 1 problem.

Overall, P.S. 63 seems more like a child-care facility than a school—a relatively benign and happy place, where an overall program of instruction was somehow never put in place. When I visited, the school was being run by a young woman named Gillian Williams; she was the fourth principal at P.S. 63 in six years. The New York City teachers' union has proposed to take over the school's management, and if it does, there will probably be a fifth principal, because the head of the union has all but promised publicly to fire Williams. Teacher turnover has also been high. Williams brought in eighteen new teachers, out of sixty-eight, for the 1997–1998 school year.

In at least a thousand of the worst American public schools outside control of administration and curriculum has replaced local autonomy during the 1990s.

Control over curriculum in New York City schools has traditionally been diffuse: the state and the city set various standards and benchmarks that schools are expected to meet, although it is not clear what happens if they don't. Otherwise the schools establish their own instructional methods. Sometimes the superintendent selects the textbooks, readers, and worksheets; sometimes the principals do. During P.S. 63's first year in the Chancellor's District it was redesigned and given the name Author's Academy, to demonstrate its commitment to making students literate. The principal bought a new reading curriculum, which teachers were supposed to use to guide their students to basic literacy. The problem, Williams told me, was that the publisher didn't make good on its shipping date. All year long the curriculum materials arrived in bits and pieces, and the reading program had no structure at all. The school's reading scores dropped drastically.

The following year Williams came in as principal. On orders from the Chancellor's District she adopted the Success for All reading program, which is extremely demanding. The school also adopted a new math curriculum that year and, because Williams considered Success for All to be insufficient, two other new reading programs. As a result most of the students were taking three separate and quite different reading classes every day. In third grade, for example, a student would learn one technique in the Success for All class for charting the structure of a story, based on Venn diagrams; another technique in the second reading class, based on "story maps"; and another technique in the third reading class, based on "character maps." The rest of the school day consisted of one math class and one period in the afternoon into which everything else was wedged. And this was just for the students in the main instructional program. A fifth of the school population was in special-education classes, and a fourth in "limited-English-proficient" classes. The school was a library of education vogues and special noncurricular functions.

A SCHOOL THAT WORKS

I SPENT a good deal of time recently in one of the Chancellor's District schools at the opposite (that is, better) end of the spectrum—enough time to move beyond the Potemkin-village phase of marveling at an inner-city school that works. A description of what happens there should convey what this particular way of fixing a broken school means, what the disadvantages are, and what kinds of opposition must be overcome if these schools are to succeed.

Public School 114 is in a neighborhood called Highbridge, which runs along the Hudson River behind Yankee Stadium. In its glory days, the 1920s, it was a lower-middle-class paradise populated mostly by Jews and Irish-Americans. Even Yankees could and did live proudly in the grand Art Deco apartment buildings along Jerome Avenue and the Grand Concourse; the humbler buildings on the cross streets were for cabbies and shopkeepers. P.S. 114, which was built in 1940, was considered a first-class school that put its students firmly on an upward sociological trajectory.

The neighborhood changed in the mid-1960s, when the Freedomland amusement park on the other side of the Bronx was torn down and the enormous Co-Op City apartment complex was built in its place. Whites left Highbridge for Co-Op City, and blacks moved in from Harlem, and then Puerto Ricans; the student population of P.S. 114 changed, first from all white to mostly black, and then to mostly Puerto Rican. The school's official name, which nobody uses, is Luis Llorens Torres Children's Academy, after the national poet of Puerto Rico. Today P.S. 114 is mostly Dominican. The surrounding neighborhood is populated by a polyglot ethnic working poor. It feels crowded and scruffy but safe; there aren't many empty buildings. Stores are filled with a wide variety of specialty items from the Caribbean, Africa, and Latin America. The elevated train on River Avenue rumbles by every few minutes.

P.S. 114, a large three-story building, has more than a thousand students, which is a third more than its official capacity. When the state's registration-review list was created, P.S. 114 was placed on it. The school's particular problem was that it had turned into a bilingual-education patronage machine. Students with Hispanic last names—which is to

say most students—were assigned to "bilingual" classes taught in Spanish, often by non-English-speaking teachers. The school generally didn't test students or seek their parents' consent before putting them on the bilingual track, and it rarely moved anybody out of bilingual education, because that would have meant losing job slots for bilingual teachers. All of this was and is in violation of the state and city regulations governing bilingual education, but administrative supervision of P.S. 114 was so lax that the regulations weren't enforced. From 1989 to the creation of the Chancellor's District, in 1996, the school suffered no negative consequences for its extremely low reading scores—in fact, the consequences were arguably positive, because the low scores qualified it for special funding. The school adopted a popular and well-regarded reading program, Reading Recovery. But the program was only nominally implemented and didn't have much effect.

Eileen Mautschke, the current principal of P.S. 114 and a thirty-year veteran teacher and administrator in District Nine, describes the condition of the district years ago this way: "The district controlled things. There was so much corruption! Money went into the school board's pockets. Decentralization gave people control over a tremendous amount of money, and very little got down to the schools. District Nine was one of the worst offenders in that respect. There were warehouses elsewhere in the city full of supplies that didn't get to the kids."

In the first year of the Chancellor's District all the elementary schools devoted a ninety-minute period every morning—9:00 to 10:30, the meatiest part of the school day for young children—to reading instruction. Rudy Crew had made an arrangement with the teachers' union under which every school in the district would be allowed to replace half the teachers by transferring them to other schools. (The union was cooperative because it feared that if the Chancellor's District didn't work, the state would hire a private company to run the schools—one that didn't use union teachers.) The schools were told to redesign themselves.

Mautschke took over at P.S. 114 in the middle of the 1995–1996 school year, just before the creation of the Chancellor's District. After off-loading a third of the teachers and hiring new ones, most of them very young, she led the staff through a lengthy series of discussions. At the end of these P.S. 114 was divided into three mini-schools, called the Author's School, the School of Environmental Studies, and the School of World Discoverers. She began cleaning up the bilingual mess. At the end of her first full year P.S. 114's third-grade reading score—the number that had gotten it into trouble—had risen moderately.

During the first year Rudy Crew realized that the Chancellor's District, though an experiment in centralizing authority, was not centralized enough. He brought in a new superintendent, Barbara Byrd-Bennett (who, ironically, had begun her career thirty years earlier as a Harlem teacher fighting for community control), and replaced more principals. Most important, at the heavy prodding of the teachers' union, Crew adopted the Success for All reading curriculum.

THE PARRIS ISLAND APPROACH

THE inventor of Success for All is Robert E. Slavin, an education researcher at Johns Hopkins University who gives off the sweet-and-sour, casual-intense air of a perpetual graduate student. Slavin has been studying education in elementary schools for twenty-five years. In 1986 the Baltimore public school system asked him to try to figure out a way to prevent inner-city schoolchildren from falling permanently behind during their first few years in school. Slavin set up a program of tightly controlled reading instruction, which began at one school in Baltimore in the fall of 1987. The idea was to devise a system that could be transported from school to school. Although during the past decade Success for All has lost its contract with the Baltimore school system, it has grown rapidly elsewhere. By the end of this school year the Success for All organization will have a budget of $30 million and will operate in more than 1,100 schools all over the country. Among its customers are the Edison Project, which is private; the state of New Jersey; and the cities of Houston, Memphis, and Miami.

There are two reasons for Success for All's quick spread. Of all the school curricula it comes closest to guaranteeing the result that state education commissioners want: higher reading scores. Although it is quite expensive—about $70,000 per school in the first year, and $25,000 a year thereafter—the program is usually paid for by Title I, the federal compensatory-education program, so there is no direct cost to school districts. Because Title I targets schools with high percentages of children from poor families, Slavin says, "high-poverty schools can afford us, low-poverty can't." Success for All is used almost exclusively in poor schools. Most school designs offer testimonials and anecdotes to sell prospective customers on their effectiveness. Slavin has statistical comparisons of reading scores from schools that use Success for All and similar schools that don't. "There's nothing on most of these programs," he told me. "No data! Organized research with control groups and reports every year, no matter what the data show—that just doesn't happen." The prevailing criticism of Success for All is that it is designed to produce higher scores on a couple of tests chosen by Slavin, for which the control-group schools don't train their students; the gains it produces, according to critics, are substantially limited to the first year of the program. Whether or not this is true, Slavin is right when he says that the other leading national programs for elementary schools can furnish almost no data at all on the results they produce.

It's not difficult to see why Success for All is so much quicker than the other programs to generate quantifiable benefits. The next two most popular programs for elementary schools—Accelerated Schools, devised by Henry Levin, of Stanford University; and the School Development Program, devised by James Comer, of Yale Medical School—are essentially planning and organization tools that give individual schools great latitude in choosing instructional methods. Success for All tells schools precisely what to teach and how to teach it—to the point of scripting, nearly minute by minute, every teacher's activity in every classroom every day of the year.

When a school adopts Success for All, its top administrators go for a week of intensive training at Slavin's headquarters. Then Success for All personnel come to the school to provide all the teachers with three days of training. The school must designate a full-time Success for All "facilitator" and a full-time parent "coordinator." Success for All representatives visit the school three times a year. Each student takes a Success for All reading test every eight weeks. Teachers must use a series of catch phrases and hand signals developed by Success for All. In kindergarten and first grade every piece of classroom material (readers, posters, tapes, videos, lesson plans, books—everything) is provided by the program. Afterward, Success for All's grip on what goes on in the classroom isn't quite as complete, because other companies' textbooks are incorporated. But it's still tight: at every level Slavin's programs greatly reduce teacher autonomy, through control of the curriculum. Slavin has developed curricula in math, science, and social studies. People usually describe Success for All with terms like "prescriptive," "highly structured," and "teacher-proof"; Slavin likes to use the word "relentless." One education researcher I spoke with called it "Taylorism in the classroom," after Frederick Winslow Taylor, the early-twentieth-century efficiency expert who routinized every detail of factory work.

The theoretical foundation of Success for All is supposedly cooperative learning, meaning that students are put into small groups or partnerships and help one another. This is true as far as it goes, but it fails to convey the full flavor of a Success for All classroom. The students do work in teams, but they don't work independently. Cooperative-learning sessions are frequent but strictly time-limited and task-defined. One purpose the sessions clearly serve is to keep students from drifting off during the times when the teacher is leading the whole class. A bit less obvious in the Success for All literature is that it teaches reading primarily through phonics (learning a word by decoding it, rather than deducing its meaning from context), which is not as popular as cooperative learning in the liberal education world. Students are tested, put into groups based on their skill levels, drilled in reading skills, tested again, regrouped, and drilled some more. The ones who are furthest behind receive individual tutoring. But everybody is supposed to learn to read.

A few minutes in a Success for All classroom conveys the Parris Island feeling of the program better than any general description could. It is first grade—the pivotal year. The students sit at their desks holding copies of a story called "Woo Zen." The teacher stands at the blackboard and says, "Okay, let's get ready for our shared story. Ready, read!" The stu-

dents read the first page of the story loudly, in unison. The teacher says, "Okay, next page. Finger in place, ready, read!" After a few minutes of this the students have finished the story. Not missing a beat, the teacher says, "Close your books, please. Let's get ready for vocabulary." She moves to a posted handwritten sheet of words and points to herself. "My turn. Maze, haze, hazy, lazy. Your turn." She points to the class. The students shout out the words in unison: "Maze! Haze! Hazy! Lazy!"

Then the teacher announces that the students are going to do "red words"—Success for All lingo for words that students can't decode from their phonemic components. "Okay, do your first word," she says. The students call out together, "Only! *O* [clap] *N* [clap] *L* [clap] *Y* [clap]. Only!" After they've done the red words, the teacher says, "Now let's go to our meaningful sentences." The students read from a sheet, loudly and in unison, the definitions of three words, and then three sentences, each of which uses one of the words. The teacher sends the students into their cooperative-learning groups to write three sentences of their own, using each of the words. "If you work right, you'll earn work points for your work team! You clear?" Twenty voices call out, "Yes!"

RIGOR AND ROUTINE

SUCCESS for All can't work unless a school's principal and teachers cooperate. Partly for that reason, and partly to avoid having the program appear to be imposed from without (though in truth it usually is), Slavin will not sign on with a school unless 80 percent of its teachers have voted by secret ballot in favor of his program. At P.S. 114 in the spring of last year teachers twice voted it down, even though a third of the teachers were brand-new and the Chancellor's District, the union, and Eileen Mautschke were all pushing hard for Success for All. Then the principal arranged for the teachers to go on a field trip to an elementary school in Brooklyn that used Success for All. On the third and final vote the program passed.

The teachers' reluctance is understandable. Success for All takes over a school and substantially limits teachers' freedom. At P.S. 114 the Author's School, the School of Environmental Studies, and the School of World Discoverers are gone—not to mention the previous, teacher-chosen reading curriculum, which involved more student creativity and less drilling. All over the school are exhortatory posters. A veteran teacher who felt that she had accumulated wisdom over the decades about how to reach children would find that Success for All, in its insistently nice way, was now telling her that everything she thought she knew should be jettisoned in favor of lesson plans from Baltimore.

The atmosphere of the school, though, is cheerful and purposeful, not grumpy. Every morning, as the children stream in, Eileen Mautschke stands in the main hallway presiding over a scene that is impressive for not being completely chaotic: more than a thousand children, at least a third of whom don't speak English and every one of whom is poor enough to qualify for the federal free-lunch program, briefly assemble in a foyer that is far too small to hold them. Last year, when I was there, the school was phasing in uniforms; this year all the students have been asked to wear

them. Mautschke, a middle-aged woman with an air of genial, slightly weary unflappability, does not have the strutting disciplinarian aspect of effective inner-city principals in the movies. If you told her that a tidal wave was about to hit P.S. 114, she would smile resignedly, say "Okay," and figure out what to do about it. But she plainly has the school under control. As she cruises the hallways during the day, she greets most of the children she passes by name.

After everyone has arrived and settled down, the hour and a half of Success for All begins. All the teachers in the school, even gym and music teachers, have been pressed into service as reading instructors, to bring down the size of the classes—not to the ideal fifteen but at least to twenty-four. Because there are forty-six reading groups and only thirty-two classrooms, groups meet in every nook and cranny: on the stage of the auditorium, in the library and the gym, in an oversized supply closet, even on the floor at the ends of hallways. It's not a scene of squalor, but it's not a scene you would encounter in a school for the children of the prosperous. P.S. 114 has been spruced up a bit since its worst days. It has the utilitarian look of a big, indestructible public facility—clayey coats of paint, clean linoleum, smudged grated windows, fluorescent lights.

People usually describe the Success for All curriculum with terms like "prescriptive," "highly structured," and "teacher-proof"; its inventor likes to use the word "relentless."

P.S. 114 goes only through the fourth grade. For children that young, and for their teachers, an intensive ninety-minute morning class is so consuming that it uses up most of the school's daily energy supply, not to mention its money. P.S. 114 doesn't do anything else nearly so elaborately as it does reading instruction. Administrators and parents (a parent representative helps in the school full time, without pay) must supervise the overcrowded lunchroom: teachers are exempted by their contract from that duty, to compensate for the length of the Success for All classes. Subjects such as science and social studies are relegated to shorter, later time slots. Not even math gets nearly so much time. Low reading scores got P.S. 114 into trouble with the state; thus reading instruction gets extra funds, staff, training, and time.

In addition to the hour and a half of Success for All, P.S. 114 devotes half an hour of every school day to preparation for state-required standardized reading exams. These classes are a junior version of a Stanley Kaplan or a Princeton Review course, in which students take old tests for practice, drill on vocabulary words, and learn little tricks—for example, that guessing on a question is better than giving up. The test that originally landed P.S. 114 on the state registration-review list and then in the Chancellor's District is called the DRP, for Degrees of Reading Power; it was until recently given to third-graders annually in May. The DRP is exactly the kind of test that education reformers most dislike. Children read a series of passages in which every seventh word is left blank, and pick from a multiple-choice menu a word to fill in each blank. They are being quizzed more on vocabulary than on understanding. For that reason New York State has since dropped the DRP in favor of another test. But during the time I spent at P.S. 114 enormous energy went into preparing students for the test—a test that teachers felt should not even be used, and that would in fact no longer be used in New York public schools after the end of that school year.

The fate of the entire Chancellor's District was heavily dependent on what these third-grade reading scores, which had not risen sufficiently in the district's first year, would be. The message had been forcefully communicated to the principals. As the date of the DRP approached, Mautschke and her teachers bore down with remarkable concentration. Every week the school's administrators met in a supply depository off the gym. These meetings were substantially devoted to test-prep matters. All the third-graders were given a pre-test in March. The worst performers were parceled out to the administrators, including Mautschke herself, to be given half an hour a day of one-on-one tutoring in addition to the regular test-prep class.

A leitmotif of the administrative meetings was the complaints of the school's consultant on teaching techniques, Deborah Fuhrer, about the overwhelming focus on test prep; Mautschke, without rancor but firmly, would overrule her. At the final staff meeting before the day of the test Mautschke outlined a program of concentrated memory drills on certain vocabulary words thought likely to appear on the test. Fuhrer said that this was a bad idea: it was imparting a trick, not a skill. One of the words the students would be taught was "anxiety." "This will increase their anxiety, that's all!" Fuhrer said. "What would you suggest?" Mautschke asked her evenly. "What would I suggest? Prayer. Prayer works well."

The third-graders did their vocabulary drills. When the test results came back, in June, 80.5 percent of the third-graders at P.S. 114 had scored at or above the state minimum level on the DRP. The school's scores are now above the average for all New York City public schools.

Of course, the score increase is a product of test prep, but not only that. P.S. 114's scores on the Success for All reading

tests and the third-grade reading test that the state will use next year instead of the DRP (which has been given purely for diagnostic purposes for several years) also went up impressively. Last May the school was taken off the state registration-review list. On the day parents were to register their children to enter kindergarten, people started lining up outside P.S. 114 at 3:30 A.M. Later registrants had to be assigned to another school, because P.S. 114 could not accommodate anywhere near the number of students whose parents wanted them to go there. The Chancellor's District as a whole registered by far the largest rise in scores on the new reading test of any district in the city. At P.S. 114 most of the students are now learning to read. Only a few years ago that was not the case.

CONTROL WHERE IT'S NECESSARY

DRAWING lessons from inner-city education successes (and, for that matter, from failures) can be perilous. An improved school has a Rashomon aspect: the moral of the story depends on who's telling it. Whatever supposedly causes a school to turn around is bottled and exported to other schools, where it may or may not work. The successful school may sink back into desuetude in a year or two. Schools are often accumulations of shiny new reform ideas that have been jammed into the same small space and don't fit together particularly well.

Nonetheless, it seems clear that although several factors were at work in the improvement of P.S. 114, including a good new principal, a higher budget, a turnover in the teaching staff, a cooperative union, better staff training, physical improvements to the building, more parental involvement, and smaller class sizes, the key was the imposition of a tightly defined, proven reading curriculum. The most important thing in education is what the teacher does with students in the classroom. To direct that requires control of the curriculum. Structural changes, supposedly the essence of education reform, can have amazingly little effect if they do not alter what teachers actually teach. The importance of Success for All is less the particulars of how the program works than the general idea that if one method can be proved to work better than any other, nonperforming schools should be required to use it exclusively. Given the paramount importance of reading in a student's education and later life as a citizen and worker, shouldn't we try to identify the best method of reading instruction, demonstrate its superiority, and then require it for children who aren't learning to read? This would inescapably require some centralization of authority over public education.

Airline safety offers a good analogy for what I'm suggesting. You can't fly on an airplane that has no radar or oxygen masks, because the federal government won't allow it. But you can get an unacceptable education in your local school, because so far the federal government has been reluctant to challenge local control. Vouchers and charter schools offer students a way out of bad public schools, but neither option assures decent education for all. Children with unmotivated or unsophisticated parents are left behind, in unacceptable conditions. Control of the curriculum from without—not for every public school, only for failed ones—is the way for the country to ensure a good education for every child.

Centralization is actually occurring fairly rapidly, but rhetorically it is still quite unpopular. We are generally in an anti-bureaucratic phase, and within education there is no organized, powerful force for centralization. Most politicians don't want to do the work of persuading voters that they should be taxed more in order to educate other people's children. Local school boards don't want to give up their power. Christian conservatives are afraid that centralization in the public schools will lead to liberal indoctrination. Economic conservatives want to privatize education as much as possible. Unions resist the teacher-evaluation systems that come with centralization.

The outline emerges of a future in which failed schools will have to adopt a standard mode of operation that has demonstrated good results.

From a philosophical standpoint the main force working against centralization is a progressive, humanist, anti-utilitarian view of the purpose of education. Most popular books about the education of young children—*Summerhill, Thirty-Six Children, Death at an Early Age*—take this view. Children are inherently creative, curious, and democratic: inspirational teachers and supportive schools can awaken and nurture these qualities; grim, factory-like traditional schools can extinguish them. Although progressive education rarely involves the kind of crude ideological brainwashing of which it is often accused, it does operate on an implied social critique: Education should counterbalance the commercial, regimented nature of adult working life. A school should be an arena for open discourse about values, not a job-skills training center. Schoolteachers—smart, hardworking people who aren't paid much and are rarely celebrated—are naturally drawn to the progressive view. It gives them creative latitude in the classroom and gives value to what they do.

What I encountered at P.S. 114 would deeply affront the progressive sensibility in education. Success for All turns teachers into drill instructors. The atmosphere is palpably one of preparing children to become workers. When I was there, Mautschke instituted a system of "scholar dollars," given to students for good behavior and redeemable for trinkets at the school store. The connection between what goes on in school and the economic world could hardly be clearer. And then there is the preoccupation with using children to generate test-score statistics that will propitiate state bureaucrats and keep the money flowing.

Probably the most celebrated progressive educator in the country is Deborah Meier. In 1974 Meier started a public school in East Harlem called Central Park East, which for the two decades she ran it was a remarkable success. Meier must be the only public-school principal to hold honorary degrees from Harvard and Yale and to have received a "genius grant" from the MacArthur Foundation. She recently left New York to start a public school in Boston, partly because she didn't like the direction in which the New York City schools were moving. Meier had helped to raise foundation money in order to "create a different kind of Chancellor's District," one that operated a string of schools on a progressive model of teacher and principal autonomy. But it was clear to her that Rudy Crew wasn't interested in that kind of thing.

I went to see Meier and ask what she thought of the district's adoption of Success for All. Of course she was extremely skeptical. She said it was natural that reading scores in the district were going up—the children were being taught how to do better on tests. "If kids are surrounded by grown-ups who don't have authority, who follow orders, how could they learn to question, to discuss ideas?" And, a little later in the conversation: "It's shameful that we've come to the point of test scores as the end of education. It's critical to do more for the intellectual side of the lives of disadvantaged kids, to introduce them to ideas. School's the only place they'll get that."

The hard nub of disagreement is over what the first task of schools should be—to impart intellectual curiosity or to impart a body of skills and knowledge. What would doubtless strike Meier as the worst excesses of the Chancellor's District and P.S. 114 are not, however, by-products of emphasizing skills over curiosity. They are by-products of decentralization.

True, Success for All and programs like it are the enemies of teacher autonomy. But almost every school that uses Success for All previously had a greater degree of teacher autonomy and was failing to teach its students well. Autonomy is hard to defend where it is demonstrably not working. It is also true that Success for All tilts a school toward reading instruction to the exclusion of other subjects—but if there has to be a tilt, it should be toward reading.

The real solution would be to develop a comprehensive curriculum covering all subjects and the entire school day—in other words, more centralization, not less. This is the aim of the whole-school reform movement, the chief promoter of which, a private organization called New American Schools, now has more than a thousand member schools that choose among eight designs, one of them developed by Robert Slavin. New American Schools persuades public school districts to abandon the usual impulsive way of reforming schools and adopt an all-encompassing design that has worked elsewhere. Even without committing themselves to New American Schools, however, many school districts have moved toward whole-school reform on their own.

Testing excesses are another consequence of decentralization. Every school gives tests. The problem lies in tests that are made enormously consequential even though they have nothing to do with what should go on in the classroom and can be prepared for with trick-pony exercises. If there were a nationally agreed-upon curriculum, regular classroom instruction would be the only test prep students would need.

I'm not suggesting that we impose a required curriculum on the great bulk of American public schools, which are functioning just fine on their own. I am suggesting, though, that nonperforming schools be put into the hands of higher authorities—up to and including the federal government—until they start performing. By far the best and most reliable means for turning these schools around would be to institute a prescribed curriculum that has been carefully researched and field-tested and has been proved to work.

Liberals have long dreamed of using the federal government to fix bad schools. The chief means has been the Title I program, passed in 1965, which gives more than $7 billion a year to schools in low-income areas. The money must be spent on instruction, but not on any particular kind of instruction. We are moving toward a better and more directed use of Title I funding, which now pays for nearly every operating Success for All program. Last year Congress passed a bill that sets aside $120 million of Title I funds for a variety of whole-school designs, with the idea of tilting the entire Title I program toward them if the results are promising. Many of the cities and states that have taken over bad schools have put together money from Title I and other federal education programs to pay for new curricula that are both intensive and imposed.

Changes of this kind are punitive to local school boards, principals, and teachers—but they had it coming. Students in taken-over schools aren't being punished; they're getting a genuine education, and hence a chance in life, that they would otherwise be denied. No reform that lets students abandon the public school system, or lets individual public schools redesign themselves in the absence of guidance, can possibly ensure a minimum standard of education for every American child. Only central control of the curriculum can. A decent education should be a guarantee, not an option. ❦

The Weekly Standard, October 19, 1998

My School Choice: Literacy First

By John J. Dilulio Jr.

Ever since she became an Immaculate Heart of Mary nun two decades ago, Sister Carmela has longed to teach organic chemistry. "I've loved organic since high school," she says, "but I've been needed to teach other things—and I've loved every assignment." For the last few years, she has been educating eighth graders at the Gesu School, a Catholic elementary and middle school with just 420 pupils located in one of Philadelphia's poorest and roughest neighborhoods. The Gesu is your quintessential inner-city miracle school. Over 80 percent of its children are non-Catholic, 95 percent are black—and 95 percent go on to complete high school, several at the region's most competitive college preps. Its annual tuition is only $1,500, subsidized by private donors, and virtually all the students receive financial aid.

Both in her attitude and in her educational priorities, Sister Carmela manifests the wisdom that underlies the Gesu's solid performance. "I'm joyful when our children succeed," she told me, "but they're all our children. . . . I think I understand the arguments for broader [school] reforms. But I don't understand why we can't all work in common to help inner-city children achieve literacy, with or without any broader reforms." The school's principal, Sister Ellen, holds the same view: "We have all sorts of programs, extracurricular activities, sports and clubs. . . . We work hard to impart good values and maintain a loving yet demanding environment. . . . But literacy is the cornerstone of academic success and a prerequisite for almost everything else they'll do later in life. . . . Here at the Gesu, all our kids can read."

And so they can, as I discovered last year when I taught at the Gesu as a volunteer. For two hours on Friday mornings, I introduced Sister Carmela's three-dozen eighth graders to American government. Most weeks I assigned LaTanya, Jennifer, Kareem, and the others four or five pages from the sixth edition of *American Government*, the textbook I co-authored with James Q. Wilson. Over the years I had assigned earlier editions of the same textbook, along with the *Federalist Papers* and lots of other reading, to hundreds of undergraduates at Harvard and Princeton. But this was the first time I had ever taught middle schoolers—much less attempted to bring Madisonian democracy to life for inner-city teens, some of them adept at dodging stray bullets, avoiding sexual predators and drug pushers, filling in at home for absent or dysfunctional parents, and coping with peers who equate studying with "acting white." Still, our Friday mornings worked, for at least four reasons.

First, these students know about the dark side of human nature. They need no persuading that Madison was right when he argued that men are "not angels." The hard part, in fact, is getting them to believe that there are governments based on rosier assumptions about human nature and centralized power. "Dr. D," asked Timothy, a prize pupil, "you mean there's folks who really think that if one person or one part of government gets lots of power they won't try to get over on everybody else, won't rip them off and stuff? Where do they live? . . . What do they say about Hitler or Russia and all that mess?"

Second, I did my best to adapt my pedagogy to my students' age and real-life circumstances—without dumbing down the subject matter or adopting an all-fun, no-work policy. The class laughed but learned, as I turned my opening discussion of the dispersal of power into an amateur martial-arts spectacle: for the separation of powers, three air-slashing vertical karate chops dividing executive, legislative, and judicial branches; for federalism, three horizontal chops, dividing national, state, and local levels of government. After our unit on civil rights and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, our class trip to Washington, D.C., included a hushed visit to the Lincoln Memorial and informal on-the-spot quizzes (How many members are there in the House? What's a line-item veto?), as well as lunch at Planet Hollywood by popular demand and a stop at the National Air and Space Museum.

Third, my volunteer teaching was heavily depen-

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dent on the intellectual and moral authority of Sister Carmela, Sister Ellen, and the dozen-plus full-time lay teachers who are the Gesu's valiant staff. Normally, a mere glance in the direction of Sister Carmela's desk or a casual sigh attending a comment about "how disappointed Sister Ellen would be to hear . . ." was enough to quiet the class or correct an unruly individual. Before long, I could count on the informal student self-policing and regard for teacher authority ("Yo man, knock it off for Dr. D! We want to hear this") that ultimately mark the difference between an orderly school where learning is possible and one where, as at the Gesu, learning is likely.

But fourth and foremost—and just as Sister Ellen had promised—all of the kids could read. Some read better than others, to be sure, and three or four struggled with simple sentences and reading comprehension. But all of them could read. They could read the textbook. They could read the newspapers and identify stories about "federalism in action." They could read billboards on the road to Washington, D.C., and books on the way home. They could read the menu at Planet Hollywood. They could read the Gettysburg Address incised in the wall of the Lincoln Memorial. At home, school, or church, they could read the Bible. They could read about W.E.B. Du Bois in preparation for their spirited intra-class African-American history competition. And as early as the sixth grade, they could read and enjoy fiction like *The Hobbit*.

Although my pupils could read, many of them had relatives, public-school peers, or neighbors who couldn't, and they knew how debilitating illiteracy is. "Maybe with older people, or the immigrants, you could get by without reading," remarked a girl named Erica. "But today if you can't read, you can't learn what you need to learn, you can't get a good job, you can't communicate like you should with other people. . . . You miss so much. It's a sin that we don't help all children to read."

It shouldn't be necessary to defend the educational primacy of literacy. The ability to read is an obvious precondition for other intellectual pursuits and skilled activities. Nor should it be necessary to point out the social value of literacy, starting with increased economic productivity, or to catalogue the social costs of illiteracy, such as increased rates of repeat criminality. Nor should it be necessary to make the case, on both practical and moral grounds, that every American child without profound learning disabilities can and should be taught to read, and that any school or school system that fumbles basic literacy is a failure.

It would hardly seem necessary to make the case for literacy first—but apparently it is. In *A Nation Still At Risk*, published in May 1998, Chester E. Finn and a number of other expert education reformers reported that in the last 15 years "over 10 million Americans have reached the 12th grade not even having learned to read at a basic level." Mind you, they *reached the 12th grade*. How many more young Americans have dropped out since 1983 without ever achieving literacy? For all the school reforms that are in the works or on the horizon, how many of today's juveniles are at risk of reaching young adulthood barely able or unable to read? And what, if anything, will today's education mavens do about it *now*?

They should start by acknowledging that America does not have a public-school crisis, it has an urban-literacy crisis. In the mid-1990s American taxpayers spent roughly $300 billion a year on public schools. Most of those schools were fair to excellent. As Princeton economist Alan Krueger argues in the March 1998 *Economic Policy Review*, over the past two decades "the public school system has not deteriorated" for most students. Similarly, education expert Diane Ravitch documents in a recent Brookings Institution report that public-school reading scores and other measures of academic performance have been "mainly flat over the past 25 years."

America's public schools are not broken, but our urban schools are plagued by high rates of illiteracy. Urban districts serve one quarter of all public-school students, a third of low-income students, and nearly half of minority students. Nationally, most urban public elementary-school students cannot read a simple children's book. Under chancellor Rudy Crew, New York City public schools have begun to improve, but half of the system's children are still reading below grade level. Under schools superintendent David Hornbeck, Philadelphia has instituted full-day kindergarten, a new teacher-accountability plan, and other promising reforms. Still, analyses of test data by local newspapers indicate that barely one in ten of the city's grade schoolers is proficient in reading.

The problem originates not in the urban schools but in the homes of their students. Since the famous 1966 study by sociologist James Coleman, social science has consistently found that home environment is the single most important factor in explaining differences in reading proficiency and other measures of academic performance. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, of the 4 million children born in 1997, nearly one out of eight was born to a teenage mother, and one out of four to a mother with less than a high-school education. According to a

report by the Philadelphia School Readiness Project, last year 37 percent of the city's public-school first graders were born to mothers under age 18 who had not graduated from high school. Many of these children enter public school without ever having been read to by an adult or held a book in their hands, much less having been taught their ABCs.

Still, there are some notable big-city literacy success stories. In their 1990 pro-school-choice classic *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe spotlighted Manhattan's School District No. 4, in low-income, minority East Harlem. Its schools' "dynamic leaders," they reported, broke free of the usual bureaucratic constraints and educated "some 14,000 students from pre-kindergarten through the ninth grade. . . . While only 15.9 percent of the district's students were reading at or above grade level in 1973, 62.6 percent were doing so by 1987." In her 1995 book *The Power of Their Ideas*, educator Deborah Meier argued that the East Harlem experience demonstrated how "all children could meet high standards of intellectual achievement within a public school setting. . . . Defending public education is difficult, but the best defense is by example."

Kevin Chadwick

Even in East Harlem in 1987, though, nearly 40 percent of the students were reading below grade level. Examples of public schools that have conquered illiteracy among inner-city minority students remain few and far between.

The reason is that well-intentioned defenders of public schools have never accepted the literacy-first challenge. Instead, they promulgate "comprehensive" reform plans. They tinker endlessly with teacher selection, salaries, testing, and training. Even though between 1970 and 1996 public-school budgets rose by over 85 percent in constant dollars, the public-school lobbies continue to demand greater funding and litigate to equalize urban and suburban per-pupil expenditures.

They do everything, it seems, but dedicate themselves to teaching children to read. They do not embrace the proposition that, despite the undeniable difficulties of teaching children from truly disadvantaged backgrounds, every child who is not genuinely learning disabled can and should become literate. The debate over phonics versus whole-language instruction is irrelevant: Research suggests that most children learn regardless of which method is used.

They learn, that is, if one condition is met: Some literate adult concentrates on teaching them how. As Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers, has argued, summer "intensive-reading" programs in several urban districts have proven quite successful. Such special programs, however, need to be repeated and replicated widely, and regular inner-city public-school curriculums need to become much more reading intensive.

Defenders of public schools are not the only ones who should heed the literacy-first call. "More school choice," proclaim the authors of *A Nation Still At Risk*, "must be accompanied by more choices worth making. America needs to enlarge its supply of excellent schools." To some extent, that's happening. Between 1990 and 1998 enrollment in Catholic schools, other Christian schools, and home schools grew by 1.4 million to nearly 5 million. In addition, today there are over 800 publicly financed but deregulated "charter" schools—and nobody knows how many unchartered, unaccredited "church basement" schools (estimates range up to 400).

As virtually every study has shown, Catholic schools normally succeed at teaching reading and other subjects, where inner-city public schools commonly fail. But in many cities, the supply of inner-city Catholic schools is contracting, not expanding. The Gesu itself ceased to be a parish school in 1993 and was kept open as an "independent Catholic school" only after it attracted financial support from local businessmen. The educational efficacy of other religious schools has not been studied systematically. Home schooling is not an option for kids in dysfunctional mother-only homes. Charter schools are multiplying, but as Finn and others point out, in terms of academic performance, they are a mixed bag.

Advocates of vouchers and school choice (and I am one) believe that in due course these policies will

increase substantially the supply of good schools, both public and private, secular and religious, and thereby increase the supply of literate people educationally equipped to hold jobs and become productive, self-sufficient adults.

But as Harvard's Paul E. Peterson explains in the September/October 1998 issue of *Philanthropy*, only in Milwaukee are data available from a randomized experiment with school choice. The Milwaukee data indicate that participants in the voucher program

> had limited positive effects during the first two years a student was in the program, with larger gains in years three and four—as much as one quarter of a standard deviation in reading. . . . To put that in plain English, if such gains can be continued at this rate throughout a student's educational career, existing differences in test performances of whites and minorities could be eliminated. Choice schools are not magic bullets that transform children overnight. It takes time to adjust to a new teaching and learning environment.

That is undoubtedly true: It could take years before even a successful voucher movement transformed the educational landscape. This obstinate fact should lead all save diehard school-choice Pollyannas to concentrate on exploring what we, alongside public-school reformers, can do immediately to prevent tens of thousands of today's inner-city first graders from becoming the next generation of high-school dropouts.

Back at the Gesu, we're in the early stages of recruiting other nearby religious schools, public schools, nonprofits, and universities to join us in launching a "summer of literacy" program open to all the children in our neighborhood. Unfortunately, we don't have Sister Carmela to help us. Named Teacher of the Year by the Philadelphia Archdiocese, she finally got her wish and is teaching organic chemistry at a Catholic high school. But those of us who used to watch her in action are still buoyed by her example—both the love and the clarity about the importance of teaching children to read. ♦

Education Week, December 16, 1998

Life-and-Death Musings

What if Research Really Mattered?

By Diane Ravitch

Cyndy Patrick

It was an ordinary trip to California—or so I thought. I had taken long weekends to the West Coast many times before, but this time was very different. The difference revealed itself on the morning after my return to New York City: I could barely draw a breath. Some corner of my brain thought "exhaustion," or "prelude to a bad cold," and I decided to ignore whatever was happening.

Twenty-four hours after my return home, my left leg began to ache. Unable to sleep, I got up the next morning convinced that I had a really bad charley horse or perhaps a cramp. Ignore it, I decided, because I had to get through the work on my desk and get ready for a trip to Dayton, Ohio, and Chicago later in the week.

After a day at my computer, I could barely stand on the left leg, but my dog forced me to leave the house: She had to go out for a walk. I dragged myself outside and fortunately ran into my neighbor, a radiologist, who happened to be on his way to a community meeting. I asked him whether to put hot or cold compresses on my leg; by chance, he noticed that I was short of breath. He told me to call my doctor immediately. He recognized the classic symptoms of something I knew nothing about: pulmonary embolisms.

The rest of the story is quickly summarized: I went to the emergency room of the local hospital, where my neighbor's diagnosis was quickly confirmed. I had blood clots in my left leg and in both lungs. If I had not received prompt treatment, the doctors said, I might have died.

When I was in the intensive-care unit, the hospital's specialists gathered around my bed, explaining the diagnosis and treatment of pulmonary embolisms to other doctors, residents, and interns. The head of pulmonary medicine described the tests that had been used to ascertain my illness, and the drugs and protocols that were employed to stabilize the clots.

As I lay there, listening to them discuss my condition, I had a sudden insight: I was deeply grateful that my treatment was based on medical research, and not education research.

At first, I thought, that's a silly idea, you can't treat pulmonary embolisms with education research anyway. But as the conversation continued literally over my prone body, employing a vocabulary that I did not understand, I began to fantasize about being the subject of education researchers.

The physicians who hovered over me dissolved, replaced in my mind's eye by an equal number of education experts. The first thing that I noticed was the disappearance of the certainty that the physicians had shared.

Instead, my new specialists began to argue over whether anything was actually wrong with me. A few thought that I had a problem, but others scoffed and said that such an analysis was tantamount to "blaming the victim." Some challenged the concept of "illness," claiming that it was a social construction, utterly lacking in objective reality. Others rejected the evidence of the tests used to diagnose my ailment; a few said that the tests were meaningless for females, and others insisted that the tests were meaningless for anyone under any circumstances. One of the noisier researchers maintained that any effort to focus attention on my individual situation merely diverted attention from gross social injustices; a just social order could not come into existence, he claimed, until anecdotal cases like mine were not eligible for attention and resources.

As I lay there, listening to them discuss my condition, I had a sudden insight: I was deeply grateful that my treatment was based on medical research, and not education research.

Among the raucous crowd of education experts, there was no agreement, no common set of standards for diagnosing my problem. They could not agree on what was wrong with me, perhaps because they did not agree on standards for good health. Some maintained that it was wrong to stigmatize people who were short of breath and had a really sore leg; perhaps it was a challenge for me to breathe and to walk, but who was to say that the behaviors I exhibited were inappropriate or inferior compared to what most people did? Some people who were short of breath and had sore legs were actually happier, I learned, than people who did not exhibit these traits. A few researchers continued to insist that something was wrong with me; one even pulled out the results of my CAT-scan and sonogram. But the rest ridiculed the tests, pointing out that they represented only a snapshot of my actual condition and were therefore completely unreliable, as compared to longitudinal data (which of course was unavailable).

I was almost completely convinced at that point that the discord among the experts guaranteed that I would get no treatment at all, but then something

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What if Research Mattered?

Continued from Page 33

remarkable happened. The administrator of the hospital walked in and said that she had received a large grant from the government to pay for treatment of people who had my symptoms. Suddenly, many of those who had been arguing that nothing was wrong with me decided that they wanted to be part of the effort to cure me.

But to no one's surprise, the assembled authorities could not agree on what to do to make me better. Each had his own favorite cure, and each pulled out a tall stack of research studies to support his proposals. One group urged a regimen of bed rest, but another said I needed vigorous exercise. One prescribed a special diet, but another said I should eat whatever I wanted. One recommended Drug X, but another recommended Drug Not-X. Another said that it was up to me to decide how to cure myself, based on my own priorities about what was important to me.

Just when I thought I had heard everything, a group of newly minted doctors of education told me that my body would heal itself by its own natural mechanisms, and that I did not need any treatment at all.

My head was spinning with all this contradictory advice. The room turned a few times, and I thought for a minute that I was in that house that got carried away by a twister in "The Wizard of Oz." Then, to my amazement and delight, I realized that I was back safe and sound (but very sick) in my bed in the intensive-care unit at Long Island College Hospital.

I looked appreciatively at the medical doctors around my bed, grateful to be surrounded by men and women who have a common vocabulary, a common body of knowledge, a shared set of criteria, and clear standards for recognizing and treating illnesses. They have access to reliable tests that tell them what the problem is, and they agree on treatments that have been validated over a long period of time.

Cyndy Patrick

The thought occurred to me that educators have something to learn from physicians. Medicine, too, has its quacks and charlatans. But unlike educators, physicians have canons of scientific validity to protect innocent patients from unproven remedies and specious theories. To be sure, not every important question can be resolved by scientific research, but medicine seems to have done a good job of identifying and implementing those that can.

I am grateful indeed that my diagnosis and treatment were grounded in solid medical research. Otherwise, I would not be here to tell my tale.

In our society, we rightly insist upon valid medical research; after all, lives are at risk. Now that I am on the mend, I wonder: Why don't we insist with equal vehemence on well-tested, validated education research? Lives are at risk here, too. ■

Unlike educators, physicians have canons of scientific validity to protect innocent patients from unproven remedies and specious theories.

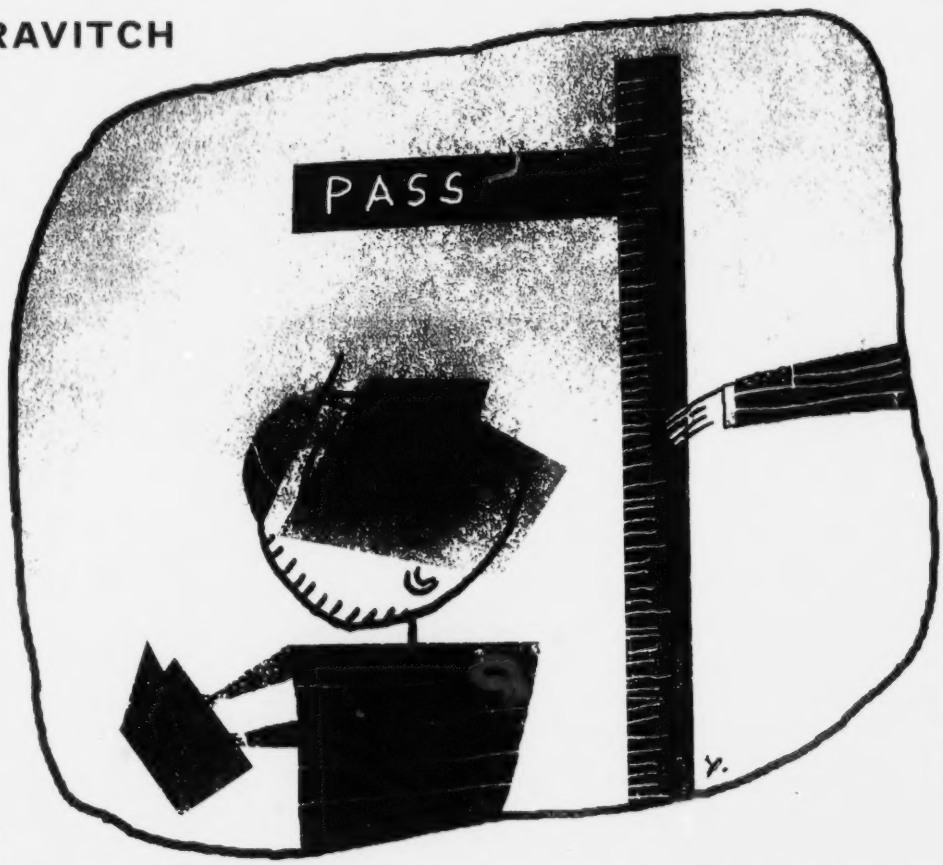
Brookings Review, Winter 1999

STUDENT PE

THE NATIONAL AGENDA IN

EDUCATION

BY **DIANE RAVITCH**



James Yang

Diane Ravitch is a nonresident senior fellow in the Brookings Governmental Studies program and editor of Brookings Papers on Education Policy *(published annually). This article is drawn from the author's chapter in* Setting National Priorities *(Brookings, forthcoming).*

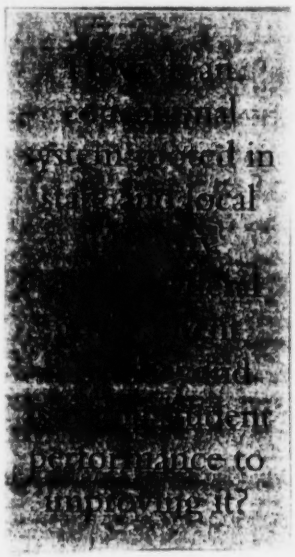
For more than 30 years, the primary goal of U.S. federal education policy has been to ensure equality of educational opportunity. The creation of programs like Title I, Head Start, and bilingual education in the 1960s and special education for handicapped children in the 1970s directed federal resources to children who had been poorly served by the nation's state- and locally based education system.

If measured by the goals of removing legal barriers and providing equality of access, federal policy has been successful. Now federal education policies must attach the highest priority to strategies that boost student performance for all groups.

RFORMANCE

The State of Student Performance

It comes as news to no one that U.S. student performance is lagging. The federally funded National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), the nation's only measure of academic achievement that tests representative national samples, has been tracking performance over the past few decades. From 1969 to 1996, according to NAEP, 9-year-olds made significant gains in science, but 13-year-olds showed no change, and 17-year-olds lost ground. In mathematics, from 1973 to 1996, students at ages 9 and 13 showed improvement, but the performance of 17-year-olds was unchanged. In reading, from 1971 to 1996, scores improved for children aged 9 and 13, but not for the older group. In writing, tested from 1984 to 1996, performance was flat for the two younger groups and declined for the 17-year-olds.



In addition to long-term data, NAEP reports student performance in relation to standards, or achievement levels (identified as "basic," "proficient," and "advanced"), that describe what students in grades 4, 8, and 12 *should* know. The most recent NAEP report shows far too many American students falling below even "basic" academic achievement. In reading, for example, 40 percent of fourth-grade students score below basic; in mathematics, 38 percent of eighth-graders are below basic; in science, 43 percent of twelfth graders are below basic. Shockingly, the scores of black and Hispanic students at age 17 are equivalent to those of 13-year-old white students in every academic subject.

The NAEP surveys are a reminder of one critical federal role in education—providing accurate statistics and assessments. But how, in an educational system rooted in state and local authority, can the federal government move beyond *assessing* student performance to *improving* it?

The State of Teacher Quality

Any effort to improve student achievement must begin with an appraisal of teacher qualifications. Students are unlikely to be high achievers unless their teachers are knowledgeable in the subject they are teaching. Yet many teachers, particularly in mathematics and science, are teaching "out-of-field"—that is, without either a major or a minor in their main teaching assignment. In 1994, 36 percent of the nation's public school teachers (42.8 percent of private school teachers) were teaching out of field. In schools where more than 40 percent of the students are low-income, nearly half the teachers are out-of-field.

The source of the problem is the lax standards—in most states—for entry into teaching. Indeed, according to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "States pay more attention to the qualifications of veterinarians treating the nation's cats and dogs than to those of teachers educating the nation's children and youth."

What can the federal government do to see that every classroom has a well-educated teacher? It should certainly *not* pump more money into traditional teacher education programs, which pay far too little attention to mastery of subject matter. It *should* focus on helping all future teachers, even those who plan to teach in elementary school, acquire command of academic fields. For example, it should offer incentive awards to states that require subject-matter examinations of future teachers. The National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities should also develop model examinations for states to use to assess teachers' subject matter knowledge at different levels.

Reforming the Governance of Education

In an effort to shift away from bureaucratic, top-down management of education by local school boards, many states and school districts are experimenting with alternative forms of school management—charter schools, contract management, and vouchers. Supporters hope that these new programs will help target public funds to actual instruction rather than to multiple layers of administration. None of the initiatives has been tried long enough to permit a definitive judgment about its effect on student achievement.

Charter schools are public schools that agree to meet certain performance standards in exchange for exemptions from most regulations other than those governing health, safety, and civil rights. Charter schools accept accountability for results in exchange for autonomy in how those results are produced. State legislation determines how charters are granted, what standards must be met, whether teachers must be certified, and whether existing public schools may convert to charter status.

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If a charter school fails to meet its educational and fiscal commitments, it may lose its charter—in sharp contrast to regular public schools, which may produce poor educational results for years without any penalty. More than 1,000 charter schools are in operation today, many in Arizona, California, Colorado, Texas, and Michigan. The primary opposition to charter schools has come from local school boards, which see them as unwelcome competition, and from teachers' unions, which want to protect collective bargaining agreements.

Another form of restructuring is contract management of public schools. Paul T. Hill, Lawrence C. Pierce, and James W. Guthrie have argued that virtually all public schools should be managed by contract, with the local school board selecting managers and leaving them free to meet agreed-upon standards. In recent years, private contractors have assumed the management of some charter schools and also formed partnerships with school districts to manage one or more regular public schools. In 1997–98, the Edison Project was managing 25 public schools in 8 states and 13 cities, with most boasting achievement gains and long waiting lists. Today Edison is managing 51 schools. Some states prohibit contract management of instructional services. Public employee unions fear that outsourcing any public-sector activity threatens their jobs.

James Yang

The third important local innovation is vouchers. Two programs, one in Milwaukee (since 1990) and another in Cleveland (since 1996), supply publicly funded vouchers to low-income students. The aim is to provide an option for students who are at maximum risk of educational failure. The concept of vouchers for poor kids arouses intense opposition in some quarters, particularly from public employee unions, but also because of constitutional concerns about the participation of religious schools. In Milwaukee, students in the voucher program may enroll in both nonsectarian and religious private schools; the program has been the subject of prolonged legal battles, but it was approved by the Wisconsin Supreme Court in June, and in November the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear a challenge to that ruling. In Cleveland, students may also attend both nonsectarian and religious schools; the inclusion of religious schools was barred by an appellate court, but the program remains in effect while the case is on appeal.

The academic effect of the voucher program in Milwaukee is hotly debated (the Cleveland program is so new as to make evaluation all but impossible). The state-appointed monitor in Milwaukee has found no improvement, but independent analysts have reported marked academic gains. Definitive judgment will require more time.

On one issue there is no debate: public opinion is shifting to vouchers. The Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll reported in September 1997 that opposition to vouchers has sharply declined over the past five years, from 74 percent to 52 percent. Public opinion was evenly divided when people were asked whether they favor or oppose "allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at government expense." Those most likely to support private choice with public funds were blacks (72 percent), nonwhites (68 percent), 18-to-29-year-olds (70 percent), and urban residents (59 percent).

All these issues must be resolved at the state and district level. The federal government, however, can help states do what they are trying to do and, at the very least, remove federal impediments. An important way to support reform without predetermining any particular result would be to change funding formulas for federal programs like Title I, special education, and bilingual education, so that the money follows the student, as it does in higher education, to any accredited institution. If a state or district prohibits charter schools, contracting, and vouchers, federal dollars would follow students to their regular public school. If a state or district establishes any of these approaches, the federal dollars would follow students to the school of their choice.

A small but substantial ($80 million) federal program channels funds to states to encourage the start-up of new charter schools (once a school is launched, regular public funding should be adequate to its needs). This program would be improved by refusing funds to states without charter schools.

Oregon, for example, has received millions of dollars from the charter program without even passing a charter school law.

As for vouchers, the federal government should support a 5- to 10-year demonstration program for low-income students in at least 10 hard-pressed urban school districts. The program should be limited to public school children eligible for the federal free-lunch program. The scholarship should be equal to the average per-pupil expenditure of the district plus any additional funds (Title I, special education) to which the student is entitled. Any school accredited by the state should be eligible to receive scholarship students. A large-scale federal demonstration program, carefully monitored and evaluated, would resolve debates that have been deadlocked by politics and ideology.

The Need to Reform Categorical Programs

The largest categorical federal programs—Title I, special education, bilingual education, Head Start—were created to provide equality of educational opportunity. All were established with high hopes, but none has lived up to the expectations of its sponsors. All are ripe for reform.

Title I, now budgeted at $8 billion a year, distributes federal funds to districts with large numbers of disadvantaged students. Congress has long insisted on spreading Title I funding as widely as possible, thus assuring its political viability but reducing the money available to districts with the largest number of poor students. Backers of Title I expected it to narrow the large gap in achievement between poor children and their more advantaged peers, but evaluations in the past three decades have all concluded that Title I has failed to meet that goal. In the main, the added funds have simply not made much difference. Unfortunately, neither the program nor the evaluations were designed to identify the methods or applications that are most effective in improving the academic performance of poor children.

Title I's most striking product, the result of three decades of federal regulations, procedures, and mandates, is its unwieldy bureaucracy. The most direct way to reform Title I—and cut its bureaucracy down to size—would be to convert it to a portable entitlement, available to its intended recipient for educational services. The money should follow the eligible student to the school or tutor of his choice. The fundamental principle must be that the federal money is allocated to benefit needy children, not to sustain a host of redundant administrators.

When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975, there was a clear need to protect the right of physically and mentally disabled children to receive free public education. At the time, an estimated one million children were excluded from public schools because of their disabilities. But while special education has grown apace, it has not lived up to its initial hopes of educating disabled children.

Today, more than five million children are enrolled in special education at a cost to the federal budget of $4.8 billion a year—and at a national cost of some $60 billion. Though Washington funds less than 10 percent of special education, it imposes extensive, minutely detailed mandates on states and districts.

Children described as "learning disabled"—a porous category that lacks any precise or objective definition—now make up about half of all children in special education. Concern is growing about spiraling costs, the inflexibility of federal regulations, and the growth of an unaccountable bureaucracy. Of even greater concern is that special education ill-serves many of the children it is supposed to benefit. After spending nearly a year interviewing students, teachers, parents, and lawyers involved in special education, John Merrow found that only 44 percent of the children graduate from high school and that most children with learning disabilities in special education show "no signs of improvement."

> The large categorical federal programs were created to provide equality of educational opportunity. All were established with high hopes, but none has lived up to them.

Congress and the administration are reluctant to overhaul special education for fear of offending advocacy groups for children who are deaf, blind, autistic, retarded, or otherwise deserving of special help. In view of the political problem, the best hope for reform is for the administration and Congress to create a special commission removed to the maximum extent possible from the political pressures of advocacy groups, much like the commission that oversaw the closing of U.S. military bases.

The Bilingual Education Act, passed in 1968 to help Hispanic children learn English, has suffered a fate similar to Title I and special education. Although its federal appropriation has grown ever larger—$354 million in 1998—the program has not succeeded in teaching English to non-English-speaking children.

The key problem has been the preponderance of "bilingual" classes that have been offered in Spanish, not in English. Given that the purpose of bilingual education is to teach English to children who are "limited-English-proficient" and given that competency in English is a prerequisite for success in U.S. education and in the modern economy, the federal program should declare that its goal is rapid, full English proficiency, not bilingualism, and be recast as the English-Language Literacy Program. If the program remains intact, Congress should at least require that no child be assigned to a non-English-language program without explicit parental consent.

Head Start was launched in 1965 as a summer program for half a million disadvantaged preschoolers. Its proponents claimed that a year or two in Head Start would wipe out the

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cognitive gap between poor children and their middle-class peers. But evaluators reported in 1969 that cognitive gains produced by Head Start were small and temporary.

Nevertheless, Head Start became immensely popular, and its role expanded. Now it provides health, nutrition, social, and psychological services for poor children, as well as employing many of their parents as teachers and aides. In 1998, Head Start served 840,000 children and received appropriations of $4.4 billion.

Head Start should return to its goal of cognitive development. The cumulative evidence from programs like the Perry Preschool in Ypsilanti, Michigan, suggests that a high-quality program—unlike what is ordinarily offered in Head Start—can make a long-term difference on achievement, high school graduation, and socialization.

As a federal—not state or local—program, Head Start could become a testing ground for high educational standards. Federal officials could develop a curriculum, focused on school readiness, without fear of intruding on state and local responsibility. They could set rigorous and uniform standards for what both teachers and children should know and be able to do. Such a reform would require larger appropriations, higher salaries, and a well-trained staff. But if a high-quality Head Start program could improve academic performance and graduation rates and reduce referrals to special education, it would have an even stronger political constituency and would generate enormous savings in later years.

All these federal programs have stakeholders who will fight to maintain the status quo. But if we are serious about equal educational opportunity, then public officials must be willing to make whatever changes will enable these programs to achieve the purpose for which they were created.

As a federal program, Head Start could become a testing ground for high educational standards. Federal officials could develop a curriculum, focused on school readiness, without fear of intruding on state and local responsibility.

Standards and Assessments

Improving academic performance across the board and reducing the gaps among different groups of students require clear academic standards and good tests of student performance in relation to those standards. Through the Goals 2000 program, initiated by the Bush administration and carried on by the Clinton team, the federal government encouraged states to develop academic standards and tests based on those standards. The quality of the states' standards and tests, however, varies widely, as can be seen by comparing state performance standards in eighth-grade mathematics and those reported by NAEP. In Georgia, for example, 83 percent of seventh and eighth graders were proficient in mathematics, yet only 16 percent met NAEP's standard for proficiency; in Maryland, the gap was 48 vs. 24; in North Carolina, it was 68 vs. 15. Only in Delaware and Kentucky were state proficiency standards as rigorous as NAEP's. The National Governors Association and business leaders are currently working to help states improve their standards and tests though Washington, D.C.–based Project Achieve.

The federal government can also help—and without interfering with the role of the states in setting education policy. In his State of the Union address in 1997, President Clinton proposed establishing voluntary national tests of fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics. Later that year, Congress directed that the tests be aligned as much as possible with NAEP and turned control of the test over to NAEP's governing board. Unfortunately, a large bloc in Congress opposes the tests, and their future is uncertain. Large majorities in every opinion poll support the idea. Parents want to know how their children are doing, and the federal government is the likeliest sponsor of a national test.

Congress should also permit school districts and schools to administer NAEP on a districtwide or schoolwide basis, if they wish to compare their performance to NAEP standards. States should be encouraged to "embed" NAEP test items into their own tests to see whether their standards are as rigorous as NAEP standards. States could thus maintain control over their own tests, but calibrate them—if they choose to do so—to the NAEP standards.

Federalism in Education

President Clinton's active interest in education has made the public aware of the crucial role of education in securing individual opportunity, economic growth, and social progress. The increased emphasis on education inevitably brings stresses and strains on our complicated federal system. What is the federal role in an education system run by state and local governments?

That there should be equality of educational opportunity—an ongoing federal priority—is not an open issue. Other questions are harder to resolve. How are we to create the conditions that allow equality of opportunity? How are we to establish programs that encourage excellence? Which level of government should do what? How should we change programs that are ineffective but that have many stakeholders?

At present, American education is mired in patterns of low productivity, uncertain standards, and lack of accountability. Federal education programs have tended to reinforce these regularities by adding additional layers of rules, mandates, and bureaucracy. The most important national priority must be to redesign policies and programs so that education funding is used to educate children, not to preserve the system. ■

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The New York Times, November 24, 1998

Long a Leader, U.S. Now Lags In High School Graduate Rate

By ETHAN BRONNER

A major new international study shows that American high school graduation rates, for generations the highest in the world, have slipped below those of most industrialized countries.

The report, released yesterday by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris, which helps coordinate policy for 29 of the richest countries, suggests that the changing picture is less a matter of American backsliding than of substantial recent progress by other nations.

For example, in 1990, the average number of years an American 5-year-old was expected to attend school or college was the world's highest, 16.3. In 1996, the latest year for which data were available, the American score was 16.8, but 11 other countries, including Canada, Spain and Finland, had surpassed that number.

In addition, the report found that the United States devoted a smaller percentage of its national income to teacher salaries than other countries.

The United States remains on top in the percentage of students who enter college, but a pattern similar to high school graduation rates is emerging.

"Entry rates to college education in the U.S. are still the highest in the O.E.C.D. but that is likely to change soon," said Andreas Schleicher, principal administrator at the organization and one of the study's authors. "While enrollments in the United States remained relatively stable between 1990 and 1996, they increased by more than 25 percent in 16 O.E.C.D. countries."

He added that the United States also had one of the highest university dropout rates in the industrialized world — 37 percent.

The report was the fifth such study issued by the organization since 1991, when it started examining educational trends. Mr. Schleicher said that over the last three years the report has been the organization's best-selling publication.

The report offers far more data than analysis, but it suggests that growing emphasis in other countries on high school graduation is a result of "the desire of employers to have better skilled workers and, hence, from individuals who see that educational qualifications improve their life chances."

Mr. Schleicher said the other nations in his organization had placed enormous emphasis on improving access to education, bringing them in line with and surpassing American achievements.

The shifting balance is likely to

Continued on Page A18

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cause concern in the United States, because the quality of American education has been the focus of growing debate for 10 to 15 years.

"I think we should be quite alarmed by this," said Gerald Graff, professor of English and education at the University of Chicago, who is writing a book on what he considers the dangerous gap between the thinking classes in America and the rest of the society. "We've never fully committed ourselves to the democratic idea of education. There is a kind of silent bargain between schools and many of its students that says, 'We'll leave you alone if you just sit there and don't bother us.' "

Earlier this year, the results of a mathematics and science test for 12th graders in many countries showed students in the United States to be among the least knowledgeable. Earlier tests showed that the lowest 25 percent of 8th graders in Japan and South Korea to outperform the average American student.

Education was widely cited by voters as their top concern in this month's state and Federal elections. Candidates of both major parties vowing increased spending on teacher training and school improvement.

Education has risen and fallen as a political issue for generations. The Soviet Union's launching of the Sputnik satellite in 1957 spurred schools in the United States to require more math and science courses.

The issue most recently gained a high profile in 1983 with the publication by the U.S. Education Department of an alarming report on American education entitled "A Nation at Risk" which said that if a foreign power had imposed such a low level of education on the United States, it would rightfully have been perceived as having engaged in an act of war.

In the years since, there have been numerous efforts to improve the nation's schools, from alternatives to public education like charter schools and voucher plans to projects to improve teacher quality, widely perceived as the system's Achilles' heel. Some states are now testing student teachers more rigorously and offering signing bonuses and student loan forgiveness to encourage better candidates to enter the profession.

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Many states are also instituting tests at various stages to insure that students do not graduate without basic skills and knowledge.

Yesterday's report shows that Americans between the ages of 55 and 64, who graduated high school some 40 years ago, had a graduation rate of 77 percent, the highest of those surveyed. Among those ages 24 to 34, the United States' rate slipped to eighth position. Today's graduation rates, with the United States at 72 percent, place it second to last in the 29-nation group, above Mexico.

It seems unlikely that the shift reflects higher standards for graduation in the United States because comparisons of adult literacy rates in the study show Americans to be among the industrialized world's least literate populations.

According to the report, the United States' expenditure per pupil is still among the highest in the group at all levels of education. It stands out in the way it has brought the private sector into college and university education, leading the way, according to Mr. Schleicher, in a growing international trend.

"Across the O.E.C.D., students in both public and private colleges are being asked to pay more for their education," he said. "Unlike in the United States, however, this spending has, in many countries, supplemented rather than displaced public spending on education."

But while the United States spends a great deal on education in absolute terms, its expenditure is about average as a percentage of gross domestic product. Moreover, teacher pay viewed through the same lens shows the United States to be among the lowest, while demands on teacher time in class are among the highest.

An experienced high school teacher in the United States earns 1.2 times the nation's gross domestic product per capita. Only the Czech Republic, Hungary and Norway pay their high school teachers less when measured as a percentage of gross domestic product. In Germany, Ireland, South Korea and Switzerland, among others, teachers earn twice or more of the per capita G.D.P.

Moreover, the average teacher salary in this country is significantly below that of other university graduates; in many other countries, like Australia, France and Britain, it is above it.

The amount of time a typical middle school teacher in the United States spends in front of a classroom per year is 964 hours, among the highest in the report.

The report adds that Americans cannot comfort themselves by thinking that theirs is a society of social mobility. It finds that children whose parents completed college are more than three times as likely to become college graduates as children whose parents did not complete high school. Moreover, the achievement gap between the well-off children of the well-educated and others is above the average for the 29 industrialized nations.

KEEPING TRACK

From Top of the Class to the Bottom

Comparing the United States with nine other selected countries

Source: Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators, 1998 - Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

The New York Times

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Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, Inc.

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Linda Neri
(617) 492-0580

STANDARDS AND TESTING—FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS—DRAW STRONG SUPPORT IN NEW SURVEY

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BOSTON, MA (October 13, 1998)—Education Reform is the single most important issue facing Massachusetts' next governor, and the public increasingly believes that a regimen of high standards and testing—for students and teachers—can improve the public schools.

These are the most significant results in a statewide survey of Commonwealth residents released today by Mass Insight Education and Research Institute (MERI), a Cambridge-based independent non-profit focused on improving public schools. The survey of 500 adult residents was conducted Sept. 29-Oct. 2 by Opinion Dynamics, a Cambridge, MA market research firm.

According to the survey, almost one-third—31%--of all respondents believe that education reform is the most important issue the incoming governor will face. The next two most important issues in respondents' minds are keeping the state's economy strong—24%; and crime and public safety—12%.

There is overwhelming support for the setting of statewide standards and testing for students and teachers alike.

Some 72% of respondents favor the state setting standards for what students in local schools should have to know; 68% think having curriculum standards and tests in the 4th-, 8th- and 10th-grades will lead to a better education.

When residents were asked to explain in their own words how public schools could show they're improving, only one answer stood out: 21% said *Show us the scores*; the public believes that improvement in statewide student and teacher test scores will be the single most important indicator that the quality of education is on the upswing in public schools. That percentage is almost three times as high as the 8% assigned the next most important factor—more and better qualified teachers.

Even if many students do badly on the first round of tests, 79% think the academic standards should not be lowered. Students will only improve if standards are kept high.

"This survey is yet another clear indicator of the importance of strong tests based on the first-ever statewide higher academic standards," says William H. Guenther, president of MERI.

-- more --

"The first test results are due to be released in early December," Guenther says. "We need to recognize that these standards are much higher than schools had in the past. Even if the scores are disappointing, we should all welcome them as a benchmark to chart the progress the state's public schools make in the years to come."

Meanwhile, 86% of respondents favor testing new teachers for minimum competency before they can be certified to teach in public schools. And 73% favor testing all existing teachers every five years for minimum competency and knowledge of their subjects, and dismissing those who fail the test twice.

Survey results also show that overall support for public schools is growing, though the public still sees room for improvements.

- 41% of the public, and 49% of public school parents, said they would send their children to public schools even if cost were no object, up from 34% asked the same question last year. 31% would send their children to private schools, down from 45% in 1997.

- 38% think public schools in their community are getting better, up from 32% in 1997. Only 14% think they are getting worse, down from 20% last year. 54% of the public, and 62% of public school parents, believe their hometown public schools will get better over the next five to ten years, up from 50% last year.

- 61%—up from 53% last year—feel that the Commonwealth's public school system is basically good, and that with some improvement and reform it can be made excellent. 28% believe only fundamental change can result in excellence in public schools, down from 40% last year.

All in all, these results show that Massachusetts residents increasingly believe that a regimen of high standards and strict testing can improve the public schools—and they clearly expect the state to try to make it happen.

MERI is an independent nonprofit corporation focused on improving Massachusetts public schools. MERI manages the Coalition for Higher Standards, a group of urban and suburban school districts and regional alliances building local support for higher academic standards and creating model programs using the state academic standards and tests to improve student achievement. MERI also runs ongoing leadership groups and briefings and produces issue reports to support the implementation of the 1993 Education Reform Act.

# # #

Dayton Daily News, October 15, 1998

EDUCATION

Most back vouchers

▶ A survey of area parents also shows strong support for charter schools.

By Lynn Hulsey
DAYTON DAILY NEWS

Most area parents believe the government should pay tuition for students who choose to attend private schools, according to a survey released Wednesday by the Washington, D.C.-based Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

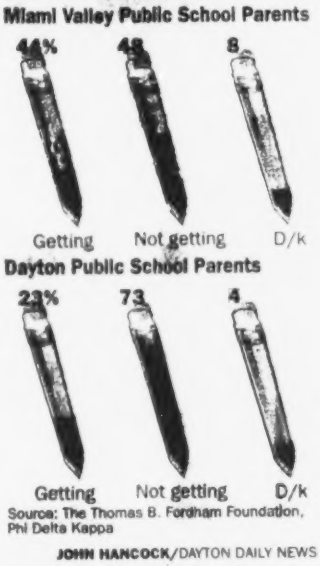
The scientific phone survey of 824 Miami Valley residents also found strong support for charter schools, which are favored by 66 percent of Dayton public school parents and 60 percent of Miami Valley public school parents.

Fordham President Chester E. Finn Jr. heralded the survey as a ringing endorsement of school choice, a school-reform idea sweeping the country. In Montgomery County, choice comes in the form of privately funded school vouchers, like Montgomery County's PACE scholarships that allow low-income public school students to get into private school, or charter schools, which are freed from some state restrictions.

Area teacher union officials and educators said the wording of some questions guaranteed a result favoring school choice. Regardless, everyone agreed the survey is kindling an already hot local debate over the future of traditional public schools, and some predicted it will fuel future efforts to change the status quo.

School funding

Do you believe taxpayers in your community are getting their money's worth from the public schools or not?



Source: The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, Phi Delta Kappa

JOHN HANCOCK/DAYTON DAILY NEWS

"It's kind of like, 'Be careful what you ask for in case you get it,'" said Dayton's Webster Elementary Principal Sandra Kidd. "Our public schools are needed. It is a foundation of our society."

Finn said he was not trying to impose his views favoring charter schools and tuition vouchers on the community. He said the results of the survey conducted by Dayton-based Paragon Opinion Research in August will be interpreted in a variety of ways.

"We hope to launch that discussion in this community," Finn said as he unveiled the results of the 32-question survey at a Dayton Convention Center news conference.

This year Dayton saw the opening of its first charter school — a publicly funded school run by a private, unelected board. That school receives per-pupil funding that last year went to Dayton schools.

And 540 former public school students now attend private school because of the Parents Advancing Choice In Education (PACE) privately-funded voucher program. The Ohio Supreme Court is considering the legality of a state pilot voucher program in Cleveland that uses taxpayer money to send poor children to religious and secular private schools.

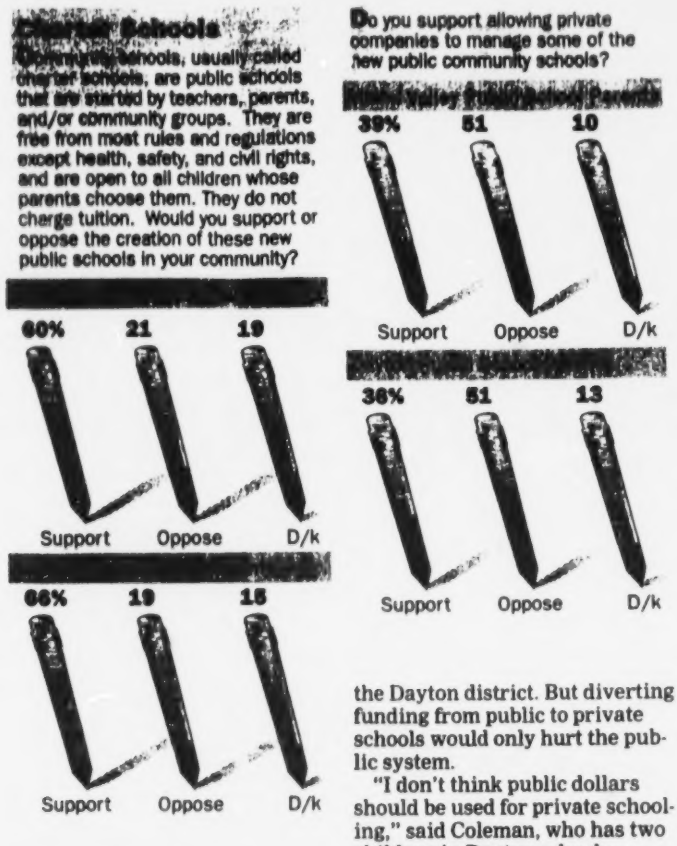
Fordham surveyed 618 adults in Montgomery County and parts of Miami, Greene, Warren and Clark counties. A separate group of 206 Dayton Public School parents was surveyed because the original survey group had fewer than 30 Dayton residents and was not representative of the region, said Anita Suda, Paragon president.

The Fordham survey's methods drew criticism from National Education Association and Dayton Education Association representatives.

"In any survey, the way you ask the questions determines the answers you get, especially when it's a volatile issue such as the education of one's children," said Heidi Steffens, senior professional associate at the NEA's Center for the Advancement of Public Education. "When you use loaded words such as 'choice' and 'freedom,' you'll get people to gravitate to your point of view."

Steffens — who was in Dayton for a meeting with DEA officials — pointed to a Fordham survey question that asked parents if

SURVEY: Support for charter schools


Charter Schools
Community schools, usually called charter schools, are public schools that are started by teachers, parents, and/or community groups. They are free from most rules and regulations except health, safety, and civil rights, and are open to all children whose parents choose them. They do not charge tuition. Would you support or oppose the creation of these new public schools in your community?
60% 21 19
Support Oppose D/k
66% 19 15
Support Oppose D/k
Do you support allowing private companies to manage some of the new public community schools?
39% 51 10
Support Oppose D/k
36% 51 13
Support Oppose D/k

they would favor a proposal allowing them to send their children to any private or church-related school if "the government would pay all or part of the tuition."

Seventy-four percent of Dayton Public School parents and 60 percent of Miami Valley parents said they would support such a proposal. A separate national poll found that 56 percent of U.S. public school parents support the same proposal.

"Had you used the words 'taxpayer money' or 'Dayton taxpayers' money' or 'your property taxes' instead of 'the government,' people would have had a clearer connection between their money and where it would be going, and you could get very different responses," Steffens said.

Finn conceded that substituting "taxpayer" for "government" likely would have resulted in fewer people supporting the idea of vouchers.

Dayton parent Angela Coleman, 32, said she is concerned about discipline problems and lack of parental involvement in the Dayton district. But diverting funding from public to private schools would only hurt the public system.

"I don't think public dollars should be used for private schooling," said Coleman, who has two children in Dayton schools.

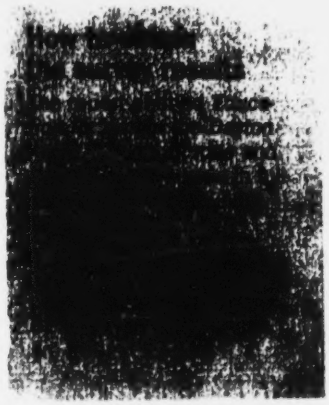
Webster Elementary teacher Jan Anderson said taxpayer funding of religious schools would erase the separation of church and state. And she said a more practical problem would be the dilution of limited public resources.

"Nobody is going to get enough money to be a genuinely good school," Anderson said.

But Michelle Campbell, founder of the Dayton-based Parents' Coalition for Change, said parents are tired of not having a choice in where they send their children to school. The parent of a Dayton Christian School student and a public school student, Campbell said she should be allowed to earmark her taxes for a private school.

The Rev. Daryl Ward, a PACE board member and Omega Baptist Church pastor, said he remains a supporter of public schools. But he wants poor parents to have the same opportunity to send their children to better schools.

"What we're asking for is a democratization of choice so we can do with our tax dollars what others are doing with their income," Ward said during the news conference.



The survey also found wide support for the public schools now educating most of the region's children. But it pointed to dissatisfaction with the public schools' ability to deal with discipline problems, bad teachers and overcrowded classrooms.

Many parents said public schools are underfunded, but they also felt that they were not getting their money's worth from the schools.

Dayton parents had a more negative opinion of their district's schools and problems than did parents elsewhere in the Miami Valley. But overall, Joyce Fulwiler Shawhan, president of the Dayton Education Association, said she was gratified at the level of support the survey showed from Dayton public school parents.

"That certainly speaks well of the Dayton Public Schools," Shawhan said. "We're far from perfect, but we're trying to get better."

Sue Elling, executive director of the Alliance for Education, a local funding and resource group, said, "I certainly don't see it as an indictment of the public schools.

"But I think it does give some information that we need to pay attention to. It's sort of a pulse of the community."

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Charter Schools

Despite the initial success of charter schools in widening education choices, boosting performance and providing safe environments, this series of articles points to some common difficulties and challenges that face the charter movement.

We start in San Francisco, where Julian Guthrie of the *San Francisco Examiner* reports in "The Fisher King" that Don Fisher, founder of The Gap, recently pledged $25 million to the development of several Edison Project schools (to be run as charters). Instead of lauding this charitable action, many groups criticized Fisher for making such a sizable donation to support schools run by a private company rather than to the traditional public schools. He's taken the heat with grace, though, and has remained committed to this promising reform.

Next to the District of Columbia where, in "The Capital Takes the Plunge," *The Economist* reports that teething difficulties and reluctant bureaucrats have not abated the rapid growth of charter schools. Tired of overseeing a school system with some of the nation's highest education funding levels and some of the nation's lowest scores in math and science, Congress has opted for charter schools. DC already boasts 17 (the most per-capita anywhere) and they are starting to have an impact on the traditional public school system.

Then to Texas. Lucy Hood reports in "Board Wants Charter School Review" in the *San Antonio Express News* that the charter phenomenon has been stemmed by the State Board of Education, which wants to evaluate the charter already up and running before granting any more.

We end our charter tour in the land of Laverne & Shirley. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* staff writer Joe Williams reports in " Classroom Boom may be on Horizon" that the growth of charter schools and school choice in Milwaukee has led to a boom in classroom construction. Williams found that this expansion is being funded not through an increase in property taxes but instead by a combination of private dollars and existing state per-pupil funding. Charter schools are finding innovative and cost effective ways of making their dollars go further. It also means that the former monopoly called the Milwaukee Public Schools now faces stiff competition in finding appropriate new sites for schools—and students to put in them.

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The San Francisco Examiner, October 18, 1998

The Fisher King

S.F.'s Edison School, with additional funds from the Gap's Don Fisher, has been criticized by many groups. Now, will it improve?

JULIAN GUTHRIE

With his clothing store chain flourishing and his personal net worth hovering at a comfortable $ 2.4 billion, Don Fisher, founder and chairman of The Gap, who turned 70 in September, has decided it's prime time to launch a new career.

"What I'm focusing on for my second career is education, specifically kindergarten through fifth- or sixth-grade education," Fisher said, sitting in his corner office at The Gap's Embarcadero headquarters. But with his initial pledge of $ 25 million to help improve public schools in California, Fisher, a San Francisco native who graduated from Alamo Elementary, Lowell High and UC Berkeley, has unwittingly sparked rowdy debates and drawn the intense ire of child advocates and teachers' unions in The City.

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At the heart of the controversy is Fisher's commitment to give the money to public schools that agree to be taken over and managed as "charter schools" by the private, for-profit Edison Project. Critics of the Edison Project, a company created by media entrepreneur Chris Whittle, who brought child-geared TV news and commercials into the classrooms via Channel One, fear corporate culture is seeping into classrooms and the basic principles of public education are being undermined.

There are 51 Edison partnerships across the country, six in California, four in the Bay Area alone: two in East Palo Alto, one in Napa and one in San Francisco's Noe Valley, on 22nd Street near Dolores. Supporters say the Edison approach brings desperately needed funding and professionalism to public school systems that are openly in crisis.

The supporters add that, despite critics' fears of commercialization of the educational process, a private company in a competitive marketplace has more incentive to deliver than the entrenched bureaucracies of existing school administrations.

Fisher says simply: "I made this first investment in education with the confidence that Edison runs schools well. It's immaterial to me whether the schools are run by a for-profit or a nonprofit. Results are what count."

Child advocate Margaret Brodkin, one of the Edison Project's most vehement critics, agrees that results are what should count. But she thinks it's "an outrage" when education officials hand public schools, financed by tax dollars, over to for-profit companies. "Democracy is undermined when public education is turned over to corporations," she says.

When it comes to Fisher, education's newest benefactor, Brodkin, executive director of Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth, doesn't mince words.

"Don Fisher should appear on the cover of your magazine with horns," she said. "He's crossed the line between philanthropy and bribery. "What we're talking about here is the single most important policy decision that is being made in public education," added Brodkin, who believes support or opposition to the Edison Project will be a litmus test in this year's San Francisco school board elections.

San Francisco schools Superintendent Bill Rojas, who welcomes Fisher's support, chides Brodkin, saying: "There are people who just want to maintain the status quo. They are part of the problem. For Margaret Brodkin and others to say this is selling our kids, that we're privatizing schools, is mindboggling. It speaks to their inability to develop high-order critical -thinking skills."

The ongoing debate over the role of private industry in public education is one of many reshaping school systems in California and across the country. Fueled by growing dissatisfaction with public schools that are perceived by many as mediocre at best, parents and politicians are demanding sweeping improvements and stricter accountability.

"The system is very inefficient the way it's set up," Fisher said. "There's a status quo the teachers unions and others would like to maintain. But that's being challenged."

Fisher is not alone in his philanthropic effort to shake up public schools. Charles Schwab, founder of the San Francisco-based discount brokerage firm, who is dyslexic and has a dyslexic son, has poured millions of dollars into public and private school programs aimed at helping kids with learning disabilities such as dyslexia. This year, Gateway High, a charter school, opened to 104 San Francisco ninth-graders. It is the

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first such public high school in America catering to kids with learning difficulties. And as part of a nationwide reform effort, about 300 schools in six Bay Area counties receive Hewlett-Annenberg, as in Hewlett Packard and former ambassador Walter Annenberg, grants of $ 131,000 a year.

Nationally, the two most prevalent attempts at reform come from vouchers for private education paid for by tax dollars and charter schools. Tuition-free and independent of local boards, charter schools receive the same funding as other public schools and fulfill the same academic requirements. An estimated 770 charter schools are operating in the United States, with 128 in California serving 53,000 students. Minnesota was the first to establish a charter school in 1991, followed by California. While the vast majority are run on a nonprofit basis, about a dozen are operated by for-profit companies, including Edison, which is the best known.

Although the basic idea has been endorsed by many, including President Clinton, the charter school approach has also been sharply attacked. Critics say it gives communities too much freedom in choosing how and what kids are taught. In Southern California, for example, a Los Angeles public school teacher proposed opening a charter school using Church of Scientology teachings. After community uproar, the proposal was dropped.

The Edison Project site in San Francisco, which coincidentally was called Thomas Edison Elementary, opened in August as the Edison Charter Academy. The Edison Project's original proposal to take over another San Francisco elementary school as well, the new Tenderloin Community School, was dropped after vociferous protest from activist groups opposed to "privatization."

Unlike the Tenderloin school, which has strong backing from a neighboring community determined to make the school a success, Edison Elementary has a long history of problems. In little more than one year, students at the school saw four principals come and go. Kids wandered the halls, pulling fire alarms and playing other pranks. Teacher morale was low. Test scores at the school have been abysmal for more than a decade. The school ranked 63rd out of 66 elementary schools in a 1997 district reading test. In math, the school ranked dead last. In 1987, on the same test, the school ranked 68th out of 69 elementary schools in reading and 66th in math.

A visit to the Noe Valley school in mid-September, however, revealed a different learning environment. Kids were quiet and well-mannered. Floors were polished, halls freshly painted, windows clean. The classrooms have new carpet, white boards and shades. New furniture, computers, phones, books, clocks and uniforms were on the way.

"This is all Fisher money," said a beaming Barbara Karvelis, school Principal, as she walked from room to room. "I can't imagine why anyone would refuse his money. Only in San Francisco, where everything is so political and politically correct"

Third-grade teacher Maria Carillo, who had been at Edison Elementary the year before, is thrilled with the new management because she doesn't have to spend her own money to buy supplies.

"We also have more time for professional development and more support from parents," Carillo says. "At this time last year, I had a lot more absences. Kids seem to like it better now."

Of the 22 classroom teachers at Edison, only four had worked at the elementary school before this school year. More than 50 people were interviewed over the summer to fill the slots, Karvelis said. Teachers who wanted to return were allowed to come back; those who didn't were transferred to other schools within the district.

Edison's teachers are in the process of determining whether they will be represented by the local union or will negotiate directly with the district.

"There were a lot of bad feelings here and people wanted to move on, " Karvelis said.

In addition to recruiting new teachers over the summer, the Edison Project made an effort to recruit new kids by distributing flyers and advertising in newspapers. As a result, enrollment rose from 330 students in 1997 to 463 this year, Karvelis said. While there are fewer Latino and Asian students, there are more white and black kids at the school. Latinos still make up the majority, comprising 40 percent of total enrollment. Whites, who made up 2.4 percent of enrollment in 1997, are now 5.8 percent. African-American enrollment rose from 36.7 percent last year to 38.4 percent this year. Karvelis dismisses speculation that the school has made an effort to enroll more middle-class blacks and fewer blacks from neighborhoods such as Hunter's Point and Bayview.

"It's a rumor, not a fact," Karvelis said. "It's fiction, and it's politically motivated. All the black kids are from Bayview-Hunters Point."

Karvelis, who has two master's degrees and a doctorate in education, boasts a strong track record in the district. She spent eight years at Bryant Elementary in the Mission District, where she was credited for raising scores from next-to-last in rankings of elementary schools to the high middle. In 1987, a year after Karvelis' arrival at Bryant, the school ranked 66th out of 69 elementary schools in reading, and 64th in

math. In 1994, the year of Karvelis' departure, the school's ranking had soared to 27th out of 70 elementary schools in reading and 20th in math.

"It takes at least three years to turn a school around," Karvelis said. "You need strict accountability and a devoted team. You also need racial and economic integration. You can't improve a school by keeping all low-income kids with other low-income kids. We want to be more integrated than we are. Kids see other kids doing something well and they imitate that."

In Yvette Fagan's combination fourth- and fifth-grade class, students took a break from math exercises. Standing behind their desks, they alternately tossed filmy pink, orange and green scarves into the air. As Fagan called out orders, the kids appeared delighted with their newfound juggling skills. Because the days are long and the only recess is at lunchtime, teachers incorporate physical activities, such as juggling and dancing, into the day.

Fagan, who was named San Francisco's teacher of the year by the Unified School District in 1996, agreed to leave Bryant Elementary and join Karvelis at Edison because of the challenge of turning around a beleaguered school. She was also curious to learn about the Edison Project.

"At this point, I feel like it's a really good model," she said. "It's very clear. Kids understand what's expected of them at all times. If I had a child, this is where I would want her or him to be."

When Fagan asked students to explain to a visitor what the school was like the year before, hands shot up. "Last year, everyone knew we were the worst school," said Jethro Bacus. "This year, it's a good school and we have things like music and art." Khadijah Brown said, "Last year there were more recesses and no one was learning. And people just threw things on the floor." Calvin Davis said, "Last year someone stole our printer so we had to lock things down." Classmate Ziad Abunie added, "We didn't have any computers that worked. This year we will." Alfredo Cruz said, "Last year was OK. But we didn't learn much. I like this year because we're learning more."

In a room where two girls were sitting by themselves quietly eating lunch, Karvelis showed off the blue and khaki uniforms, due to arrive at the end of September. The uniforms, by Old Navy, whose parent company is The Gap , were pinned up on the wall, right next to an Old Navy shopping bag, something that would surely fuel concerns over corporate influence in classrooms. Karvelis scoffed at the notion of any appearance of conflict of interest. "I don't know why this shopping bag is here," she said, taking it down. "We chose Old Navy because the kids like the clothes and they're cheap."

At San Francisco's Edison site, teachers are making about $ 2,300 more a year than those working at regular district schools, according to Kent Mitchell, head of the United Educators of San Francisco. But, the Edison Project teachers also work longer days in a longer school year. Mitchell is angry that Rojas, Fisher and the Edison Project negotiated the San Francisco contract without having union representation at the table.

"The reason the Edison Project turned so contentious is because it was designed in secret, decided in secret and implemented in such a way that makes you think people have something to hide," Mitchell said. "By carving teachers and their representatives out of the bargaining process, it feeds into this assumption that the problem, the obstacle to making this school run well, is teachers. I'm offended by that."

For his part, Fisher doesn't shy away from criticizing the politically powerful teachers unions. "This tenure system forged by teachers unions is poor," Fisher said. "It's a seniority system. The teachers don't have to be held accountable for what they do. There should be tests and standards for teachers. If they don't do their job, they should look for another job. It's really that simple."

Fisher's son, John, 37, who runs the family investment business but has no official role at the Gap, owns a 4 percent stake in the New York based Edison Project. He invested in the company after visiting East Coast Edison charter schools. "I think this is an educational model that can have a really big impact on the way kids are taught around the country," Fisher said. He added: "My father is a product of public schools in San Francisco and he and my mom were interested in trying to do something for the public school system. The focus is to make grants to disadvantaged school districts. This is not funding for the middle-class and above."

Through the Donald and Doris Fisher Foundation, the Gap founder has agreed to kick in more than $ 1.3 million to cover costs of transitioning to the Edison Project model at each school. Fisher estimates the foundation will invest in 15 schools with 600 kids each, totaling "9,000 kids taking advantage of Edison." Because of the high costs of operating schools in California, and the low per-pupil spending, the Edison Project will not take over a school here unless someone like Don Fisher provides supplemental funding.

"Five thousand dollars might be sufficient to open a school in Wichita, Kan., but it's not sufficient in California," John Fisher said.

California spent $ 5,789 in 1997-'98 on each of its 5.6 million students, compared with a national per-pupil average of $ 6,131, according to the nonpartisan legislative

analyst's office. The California spending figure is significantly behind such states as New York and New Jersey, which spent $ 8,442 and $ 9,644, respectively.

Don Fisher, who says he has "no interest in pushing Edison or any other group," has confidence in Edison as a system that works and can be replicated anywhere.

"Schools need a standard curriculum and consistency. If you have a different philosophy at each school, there's no consistency," Fisher said. "Other people can learn from Edison. It's just like with our company: We do it better than smaller companies. We have a system that works and it works across the country. "Let's face it, we're in the business of educating our kids," Fisher continued. "What's good about for-profit is that it generally has a process of incentives for people. I've learned things running my business, so why not look at a school system the same way I look at my company?"

All Edison Project sites have school days that last eight hours, two hours longer than the typical school day. (Kindergarten students are at school for six hours a day.) The school year is 10 days longer in the first year of operation; 25 days longer thereafter. Students receive enriched art, music and language instruction, classes that have been cut from cash-strapped public schools. The Edison Project also lends home computers to students from the third grade up. Teachers are given four weeks of paid training before school starts and 90 minutes daily for "prep time."

Leading education researchers who have followed the Edison Project and the controversy surrounding it are mixed on what the program has to offer and differ on Fisher's role.

"I think the Fisher operation is a little fishy," said UC Berkeley education professor Bruce Fuller, director of the education think tank Policy Analysis for California Education. "Why is it OK for Don Fisher to subsidize public schools that his son then earns a dividend on? It confirms people's suspicions that private contracting doesn't aim to help kids but is fed by the profit motive." It's not "sacrilegious," Fuller added, for people to earn a profit by providing more effective schools. "To Superintendent Rojas' credit, he's been willing to take criticism over Edison and go ahead and try new forms of schooling," Fuller said. "In that sense, it's good he's inviting in some of these groups."

Stanford education professor Michael Kirst has been impressed by the Edison education model but would urge districts that sign on with the company to establish clear oversight plans.

"What's favorable to me is that Edison has a very specific vision of what their education program should be," Kirst said. "As long as a public school district has the contract, to me, that's not privatizing. They're merely the vendor."

Private companies are hired by public schools every day, Kirst said, providing school lunches, textbooks, transportation and even tutoring. "What must bother people," mused Kirst, "is that Edison comes in and takes over the whole school. But they're not privatizing in that they're operating under contract. It's very easy for a school district to get rid of Edison. In my mind, there's nothing wrong with for-profit companies running public schools as long as they are overseen carefully by school boards or a sponsoring agency."

Fisher says the Edison Project is merely his first foray into funding public school reform. "Education is what I'm going to spend a day a week working on," Fisher said. "This is the most money I've ever given to anything. It's not easy to give intelligently.

"I've been a success in what I've done," Fisher continued, looking around his office, filled with artworks by Frank Stella, Alexander Calder, Ellsworth Kelly and Cy Twombly. "It's important to give back to the community. I have no idea how much I'll end up giving. A lot has to do with whether we can find places to give it and where we can have an influence."

Examiner education writer Julian Guthrie is the winner of the 1997 John Swett Award from the California Teachers Association. Her last article for the Magazine was on state schools chief Delaine Eastin.

The Economist, October 17, 1998

Education

The capital takes the plunge

WASHINGTON, DC

THE Cesar Chavez Public Charter School is not much to look at: a few rooms in the basement of an ageing shopping mall in Washington, DC, minutes away from some of the city's worst slums. Yet the school's founder, Irasema Salcido, hopes to produce a future mayor from the 60 black and Latino students who started work in September. The chief aim of the Chavez school, one of 17 charter schools now working through their first term in Washington, is to educate inner-city students for careers in public service.

Although debate about the future of America's schools has consumed this year's budget negotiations, legislators seem to have lost sight of the charter-school revolution. First introduced in Minnesota in 1991, such schools have spread across the country. There are now over 1,000 in 27 states, and the national total could well rise to 2,000 by the turn of the century. The rate of growth is highest in Washington, which allows up to 20 new ones a year. Although these are still public schools, not private ones for which pupils pay, once a school is approved it can set its own curriculum and hire teachers without having to answer to a public-school bureaucracy. In theory, this allows teachers to inject life into a system in desperate need of reform.

Washington is a case in point: indeed, perhaps the worst case. The city spends the second-highest amount per pupil in the country, yet ranks bottom in maths and science proficiency for eighth-grade students (roughly, 14-year-olds). Washington's high schools have the highest drop-out rate in the country. In the wretched Anacostia section of the city, only half the children of high-school age attend school at all, and only half of those manage to graduate.

For charter-school advocates, there is only one solution: introducing competition into the system. As charter schools begin to present parents with more options for their children, traditional public schools will have to raise their standards in order to keep students (and hence dollars) from fleeing. Chester Finn, an education expert, argues that many public-school bureaucracies which oppose the growth of charter schools care more about their own financial interests than the interests of those they are supposed to serve: the pupils.

Not surprisingly, many Washington public-school officials disagree. They think the city's charter-school experiment represents a dangerous, even subversive, trend in public education. At a recent meeting, one Board of Education member argued that charter schools skim the best students from the other schools, creating a "schism" in the system. Another official proposed a moratorium on charter-school growth. Perhaps feeling the political heat, several of Washington's Democratic mayoral candidates claimed that the rapid growth of charter schools was encouraging a flight from the city's other public schools.

Money can be a problem. Although charter schools receive the same amount of money per pupil as ordinary public schools, most receive nothing for capital and operating costs. Since it is generally difficult to educate students without desks, chairs or a school building, charter-school heads must seek outside help. They sometimes suspect that local governments are deliberately hindering the movement by failing to allocate enough money. The local authorities in Washington have promised a capital allocation for each charter school this year, but school principals have already had to raise capital from corporations and private foundations. This sometimes works to their advantage: some charter schools have better computing facilities than most small colleges.

Because they are still relatively untested, charter schools may or may not be a cure for America's education troubles. There is a danger that some states, seeing them as a panacea, will begin blindly granting charters to all who apply. Yet, as the Washington example illustrates, a lenient charter-school law can give parents what they most crave, an alternative. If only for the challenge they pose to the deadly complacency of the public-school establishment, they deserve to gain momentum.

Board wants charter school review

By Lucy Hood
EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

The State Board of Education decided Friday to ask the Legislature to cease the authorization of charter schools until an evaluation can be made of those already in existence.

Also, one charter was granted and one denied for San Antonio.

The charter school issue was the only contested part of the board's Legislative proposal, which was approved with three dissenting votes and two abstentions on the 15-member board.

Robert Offutt, whose district includes part of San Antonio, said the Legislature might view the board's proposal as an attempt to shirk its responsibility for charter schools.

"Given the strong support the governor and the lieutenant governor-elect have for the charter program, it could result in the establishment of another body to oversee charter schools," said Offutt, a conservative who cast one of the three negative votes.

Outgoing Chairman Jack Christie warned the board would feel the burden of responsibility when some of the charter schools fail to accomplish their goal, therefore an evaluation should be done before the program is expanded.

"Some of these are going to fail and you will be held responsible for these," said Christie, who received a standing ovation at the end of his last board meeting.

> **" Given the strong support the governor and the lieutenant governor-elect have for the charter program, it could result in the establishment of another body to oversee charter schools."**
>
> ■ Robert Offutt
> board member

He has said he will submit his resignation before the end of the year.

After voting to recommend stemming the charter school program, the board granted approval for 14 new charter schools to be administered by the Eagle Project, a recently formed non-profit organization based in Lewisville.

The Eagle Project applied for 30 charter schools, each catering to about 50 at-risk students in 28 cities, but the board ultimately denied the charters in school districts that had submitted a statement to the board saying the charter would have a negative impact on the district.

The Edgewood School District stated there would be a negative impact, so that charter was denied, and the San Antonio School District said there would be no adverse effect, so that charter was approved.

The board also will ask the Legislature, which convenes in January, to increase funding for teacher salaries in order to bring wages up to the national average. Teacher pay in Texas currently ranks 37th nationwide.

Other Legislative proposals include continued support for Gov. George W. Bush's reading initiative, the creation of a similar initiative for math, additional funds for school facilities and expansion of the state's health insurance program to include public school teachers.

In other business, the board presented San Antonio resident Ferdinand Rosenfeld with an award for his dedication as a volunteer at Clear Springs Elementary School in the North East School District.

Now retired from the printing business, Rosenfeld walks across the street from his home to the elementary school four days a week. He spends about three hours each day helping out at the school.

"My specialty is working with first- and second-graders, helping them to read," Rosenfeld said.

He recalled the joy he felt when one student finally mastered a word he had been trying to pronounce for weeks.

"The little ones are so cute and they're so eager," the 76-year-old Rosenfeld said.

A small entourage of family members, including Rosenfeld's wife, his two children, a grandchild, his sister and a brother-in-law, watched as Rosenfeld received the award from Joe Bernal, whose district seat includes part of Bexar County.

San Antonio Express-News, November 14, 1998

Classroom boom may be on horizon

Charter reforms spawn push for new or renovated schools

JOE WILLIAMS

Just five years after the prospects for new school construction seemed doomed by a building referendum that was torn to shreds by taxpayers, Milwaukee is on the verge of a possible construction boom for new classrooms.

In addition to the major announcement last week of an unprecedented $25 million private sector contribution toward a new technical high school, Milwaukee schools could be weeks away from groundbreaking for more than a dozen other new school buildings. Much of this activity can be attributed to Milwaukee's experiments with education reforms most particularly, charter schools. And the good news for taxpayers: It's occurring without any major hit on property tax bills.

"We're in a competitive marketplace now," said Todd Robert Murphy, an advertising and public relations executive who in 1993 campaigned against the $366 million building referendum sponsored by then-Superintendent Howard Fuller. Murphy and others who opposed the referendum at the time say now they were never against the idea of helping the children of Milwaukee. But there were tremendous concerns with turning over large sums of cash to Milwaukee Public Schools.

"MPS isn't the monopoly anymore, and thing s have changed," Murphy said. Two developments in education reform are chiefly responsible for the change: charter schools and school choice.

Applications on file with the city from groups desiring to establish charter schools through the Common Council show that a handful of organizations are prepared to begin work on facilities immediately if they are approved by the city this month. Add to that plans by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to approve its own set of charter schools that will have to be housed somewhere in the city.

The Greater Milwaukee Committee last week announced a $25 million private sector contribution toward the new technical high school. MPS Superintendent Alan Brown said the district would be able to finance its portion of the project without a tax increase.

Fuller, who now heads the city's Charter School Review Committee, said the potential building phenomenon is symbolic of how much the entire local education system has opened up with the introduction of charter schools and vouchers for poor students to attend private school at state expense.

"There's room now for private investors and contributors to see themselves as part of things," Fuller said. Fuller believes that charter schools, and private school choice, will play a role in rebuilding neighborhoods in the city.

In the case of the potential charter schools and the new Lynde and Harry Bradley Technical and Trade School the buildings will be constructed without any additional tax increases. The referendum that failed in 1993 would have raised property taxes considerably. Nearly all of the charter schools that have applied with the city will pay for their facilities using the per-pupil costs they receive from taxpayers to educate their children.

Charter schools are public schools that operate outside the public school district. In the city's case, the Common Council is able to grant charters to groups that wish to begin schools.

The aggressive market for school sites has meant stiffer competition for MPS, which continues to search for new school sites to alleviate crowding in the district's classrooms and its most popular schools. In some cases, particularly when a charter school is associated with a corporation with deep pockets, charter schools may have an edge in negotiating purchases and building projects over MPS, which is running on a tight budget be cause of state-imposed revenue limits. For substantial building projects, it is often necessary for MPS to ask approval from voters in a referendum. It remains to be seen whether the charter school explosion will grow to the point that MPS' space needs are no longer an issue.

Over the last year, Superintendent Brown has created a task force to study available sites and to be prepared to compete for leases and purchase deals. The district has had to become rather creative in seeking partnerships for new classroom space. In a partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, MPS is already involved with the construction of a new school in Metcalfe Park that will also double as a community center. The district is also working with Community Baptist Church in Sherman Park to build a new addition for Hi-Mount Community School.

Add to those building projects the potential impact of charter schools, eight of which could be approved by the city alone for next school year. The former west campus of Sinai Samaritan Medical Center at 2000 W. Kilbourn Ave. is the possible site of a YW Community Education Center Charter School, one of the applicants to the city for charter status.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

School Choice

Frustrated at the interminable delays with public school reform, the private sector has taken the initiative in affording poor students more choices among schools.

Amity Shlaes, in her *Wall Street Journal* article, "Voucher Program Passes the Test," provides an overview of successful scholarship and voucher programs instigated by civic entrepreneurs in New York and Ohio. Recent evaluations show marked academic gains for students who used scholarships to opt into private and parochial schools. The results: improved academic results and satisfied parents. Despite these successes, New York continues to drag its feet on publicly-funded school vouchers. (To our surprise, however, it has just okayed a fairly strong charter school law.)

In Texas, where everything is big, private funders have offered *every* child in the Edgewood School District in San Antonio a scholarship to attend the school of his or her choice. So reports Thaddeus Herrick in his *Houston Chronicle* article, "Testing Vouchers." Six hundred students, or 5% of the district's enrollment, signed up in the first year and are using their scholarships at over 50 private schools. The $3 million dollars in state aid that left with them has certainly gotten the attention of the public school system—which supposedly "welcomes" competition.

In recent months, we have seen education labeled the next great battleground for civil rights. Trevor Coleman, writing for the *Detroit Free Press,* finds in "School Vouchers May be a Tool to Help Build Educational Equity" that many African-American scholars and community leaders are keeping an open mind about solutions to the education crisis, maybe even including vouchers.

Amity Shlaes writes about Vermont's St. Johnsbury Academy for the *Wall Street Journal* in "School Choice Isn't a New Idea." The Academy has been operating as a "voucher" school for more than a century. For a fee, it accepts students from around the state—and the world. Its scholarship assistance program allows it to take many disadvantaged and special education students. It does a great job academically. But it faces an uncertain future, as the Vermont legislature debates changes to property taxes and the education system.

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Voucher Program Passes Its Test

By Amity Shlaes, a member of the Journal's editorial board

New York needs school vouchers, but neither of the city's two Rudys, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew, has shown much interest in liberating kids from the city's dismal public schools.

So 18 months ago some Wall Streeters got together and started their own private voucher experiment. First they put together the School Choice Scholarships Foundation to fund partial scholarships to send poor kids to private and parochial schools. Next they established a lottery to dispense 1,200 proto-vouchers worth $1,400 each to kids from homes below the poverty line. Then another set of philanthropists paid for researchers at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government to monitor the kids. The hope was that the experiment would yield results powerful enough to shock the local educational establishment.

This week, the results came in. Second- through fifth-graders who attended private school on vouchers outperformed a control group that remained in public school purgatory. In all grades except the third, both reading and math scores were higher. And in fourth and fifth grades, the differences were important: The scholarship kids scored an average of six points higher than public school peers on standardized tests in math, and four points higher in reading. This is significant since fourth and fifth grades are when kids tend to fall off the education charts, heading toward dropout land.

Paul Peterson, the Harvard political scientist who led the study, points out that the scholarships produced another important thing: happy parents. Close to half of all parents gave their new schools an "A" grade, compared with just one-eighth of parents in the public school group. Six in ten said they were well satisfied with their scholarship schools, compared with only two in ten at the public schools.

There are several conclusions to be drawn. One is that, as Mr. Peterson puts it, "nuns can really deliver education." Most of the families in the program sent their kids to Catholic schools, where their voucher money went a good deal further than it would have at Dalton, to name a typical East Side private school. Another is that in the future Mayor Giuliani is going to have a harder time ducking the question of vouchers or hiding, as he is wont to do, behind the issue of church-state separation. In short, this a useful way for the private sector in any city to transfer power to parents and away from educrats.

Business leaders across the nation have begun to figure this out. In recent years investors and philanthropists in more than 45 cities have launched similar field experiments. The Center for Education Reform, a Washington-based choice group, counts 17,000 children now involved in various private-sector choice projects. In Indianapolis, Pat Rooney of Golden Rule Insurance helped build a program that serves more than 1,000 kids. In Cleveland, the Brennan family built two private schools so families had a place to use their state voucher scholarships. In Dayton, Ohio, the Parents Advancing Choice in Education program, known as PACE, also privately funded, is expanding to serve 1,000 kids. Last year Washington, D.C., got a scholarship fund for proto-vouchers. And last month venture capitalist Ted Forstmann and Wal-Mart scion John Walton announced they would form the Children's Scholarship Fund, set to serve an additional 50,000 kids nationally.

Some of these voucher Medicis see helping poor children as an end in itself, which of course it is. But private money, even in premillennial America, can't rescue everyone. So it's important that these programs force public schools to compete, and, eventually, give rise to real vouchers. In courtrooms across the country, school choice programs are under assault--a single law firm, the Institute for Justice, has found itself defending parents in choice cases before five different state supreme courts. Today or Monday the U.S. Supreme Court is set to announce whether it will hear a key school-choice case. In June the Wisconsin Supreme Court allowed Milwaukee's pioneering voucher plan to go forward, turning aside church-state claims from the ACLU and the teachers unions. It may soon be up to the Rehnquist Court to make private charity vouchers an exercise in planned obsolescence.

Houston Chronicle, November 24, 1998

TESTING VOUCHERS

Program gives students a choice, puts pressure on Edgewood

By THADDEUS HERRICK
Houston Chronicle San Antonio Bureau

SAN ANTONIO – Blanca del Rio had a choice.

Keep her two daughters at a mediocre school in Edgewood, one of the state's worst urban school districts, or accept a scholarship that would allow Roxanna and Annibel to go to whatever school they like.

The group offering the scholarship, the Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation, said it wanted the best for del Rio's daughters. But like school-voucher proponents across the country, CEO also is betting that private schools can provide del Rio's children a better education than struggling public ones.

In the Edgewood district, voucher proponents are making a still bolder bet. They believe competition can reform the school system, either by forcing campuses to improve or by shutting them down, and they intend to offer the CEO scholarships as proof.

"In the real world, competition forces bureaucratic institutions to be responsive to our needs," said Allan Parker, president of the Texas Justice Foundation, a conservative think tank and Edgewood critic. "Customers have power because they don't have to take failure and excuses."

CEO is providing $50 million in scholarships for poor kids in Edgewood, making it potentially the largest program of its kind in the country and the only one to target an entire school district.

Already more than 600 kids, slightly less than 5 percent of Edgewood's enrollment, have accepted CEO's 10-year offer, costing the district some $3 million in per-pupil funding from the state. Another 100 Edgewood-area kids previously enrolled in schools outside the district also signed up.

In all, they are attending some 50 San Antonio schools, ranging from traditional parochial schools to Christian school start-ups operating out of strip-mall storefronts and erstwhile nightclubs.

Del Rio accepted the offer, pulling her daughters out of Gonzalez Elementary School this fall with little hesitation. Roxanna's fourth-grade teacher was absent most of last school year, resulting in a parade of substitutes. Annibel finished the first grade unable to read, but was passed to second grade nonetheless.

See EDGEWOOD on Page 8A.

"I will never go back to that school," said del Rio, who now sends her children to Sendero Christian Academy, outside the Edgewood district. "It was my mistake leaving them there in the first place."

CEO's challenge makes Edgewood a key battleground for the future of public education, especially as states consider publicly funded vouchers as a way to address foundering urban schools. Texas lawmakers plan to introduce yet another voucher bill, most likely a pilot program for low-achieving schools, in the upcoming legislative session. Republican gains in this month's election indicate the measure may well succeed.

Edgewood Superintendent Delores Muñoz says she welcomes CEO's competition, though she says the district needs no incentive for reform. But Muñoz also shares the concerns of many proponents of public education who predict that vouchers will turn public schools into schools of last resort, shaking the very foundation of American democracy.

"The old-fashioned principle of 'one for all and all for one' will be hard to regain once abandoned," writes Deborah Meier, a leading public school defender in *The Power of Their Ideas*, her acclaimed 1995 book.

■■■

This is not the first time Edgewood has been in the midst of a school reform controversy. The state's poorest urban district, Edgewood fought long and hard for equal funding of Texas public schools, finally prevailing about a decade ago.

But hundreds of millions of dollars in state aid later, Edgewood still lags behind the rest of Texas in academic achievement.

With equity has come better test scores and broader educational opportunity, such as accelerated programs for math, science and the performing arts. But at Gonzalez Elementary, not even half of last year's fourth-graders passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills in reading, writing and math. At the district level, not even two-thirds of Edgewood students passed the state's basic skills test.

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Whether kids who use vouchers can achieve better academic results is an unanswered question. Three studies of a publicly funded voucher program in Milwaukee, one of two of its kind in the nation, all reached different conclusions. Whether vouchers can reform public school districts is a bigger question.

In Edgewood a Washington, D.C., think tank called the Packard Foundation is funding a 10-year study by Mathematica Policy Research, Harvard University and the Tomas Rivera Center at the University of Texas. Although Edgewood opposes the study and its school board voted last week not to allow access to district students and their families, the study will go on.

Researchers say greater choice generally improves schools. But change in the Edgewood schools may ultimately depend on pressure from the public, which for years has tolerated dysfunctional school systems in the state's poor minority communities.

"If this was your child or my child, we wouldn't take this," said Henry Levin, a leading education scholar at Stanford University. "But because these are other people's children, with names like Juan, we accept it."

For now, the reform of choice is vouchers. This month the U.S. Supreme Court gave the movement a boost, choosing not to review the Milwaukee case, which involves the thorny issue of taxpayer-paid vouchers for religious schools. Though the decision effectively sidestepped the issue, it leaves the Milwaukee program in place and encourages other states to follow suit.

Polls show that most Americans favor some sort of school voucher. Among Texans, 46 percent would back a proposal allowing public school students to use tax-funded vouchers to attend private schools, according to the October Texas Poll, with 43 percent against.

Still, publicly funded programs have been voted down in 21 states, the most recent defeat coming this month in Colorado. But programs like CEO's are springing up all around the country, indicating that backers of vouchers are not easily deterred.

"The idea is to restore to public school education the same sort of basic freedoms we've come to expect in just about every other phase in our life," said Chester Finn, president of the Fordham Foundation, a Washington-based school-reform group.

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School vouchers owe their political start to a lawmaker from Milwaukee's inner city who saw them as a way to get poor black students out of bad schools. In Texas, vouchers find support from legislators such as Laredo's Henry Cuellar and Ron Wilson of Houston, Democrats who see them as empowering their minority constituencies.

"The bottom line is you're giving parents a decision," said Cuellar, who two years ago sponsored an unsuccessful voucher plan for kids in low-achieving schools.

Conservative Christians also favor vouchers as a way of shoring up America's moral foundation. The man bankrolling most of the CEO program is James Leininger, the San Antonio hospital beds tycoon and underwriter of causes dear to the religious right.

But it was conservative economist Milton Friedman who originally proposed the idea of a voucher system. Today those who make up the voucher coalition see things much the way he did in 1955. Parents determine winners and losers in the education marketplace. High-performing schools are rewarded with students. Low performers go out of business.

In Edgewood, the free market is already demonstrating its force. Since CEO announced its offer last spring, at least two new schools have opened to meet demand, both in the Edgewood community.

Neither school is a traditional campus, nor does it need to be. Though CEO promises up to $4,000 per student per year for 10 years, the foundation sets no standards for the schools it funds.

One of the start-ups, El Shadai New Hope Christian Academy, is sandwiched between a beeper store and flower shop at a languishing strip mall called Edgewood Square.

El Shadai has only four students, ages 11 to 14, who together do not generate enough tuition to cover costs. Its staff of four includes a teacher with no more than a high school education, though its director, Art Gallegos,

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boasts a law degree from the University of New Mexico.

"We're going to have our students kicking some serious tail," said Gallegos, sitting in the near-vacant, one-room school, a former store front now furnished with a desk, two work tables and two computers.

A nonpracticing attorney, Gallegos has worked in everything from construction to carpet cleaning. His colleague, Antonio Baldizon, a graduate of a California school called Vision International University, came up with the school's name, which means God in Hebrew.

Who sends their children to schools like this? One parent, Lourdes Orozco, helps run the flower shop next door. She is delighted with El Shadai and the personal touch it provides her son, Antonio.

"Since they're just starting, they have to prove themselves," she said. "So they give 150 percent."

Down the road a former bar called Chino's Ice House is home to Family Faith Academy. It sells itself as a sort of Christian-style Sylvan Learning Center, with cubicles for its students – nine so far – rather than classrooms. Director John Rhodes said that "where the pool table used to be, we'll have our computers."

Such start-ups may prove successful, but they underscore the concerns of voucher critics, who argue that private schools allow little public scrutiny. Texas exempts private schools from the state's accountability system, which involves a detailed academic and administrative report.

"The best way I know to strengthen public schools is to strengthen public schools – schools that are accountable to all of us," said Maria Robledo, director of the Intercultural Development Research Association, a local education advocacy group and Edgewood advocate.

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Most of the CEO recipients chose parochial schools with track records. Still, the private school transition has included transportation headaches and hidden costs, making the move from public to private difficult for some.

Nor has academic success come easily for the CEO kids. Annibel del Rio in particular has struggled at Sendero, as has Adam Anzaldua, a freshman at Holy Cross High School whose mother chose not to send him to Kennedy High School.

"It's just a whole different environment," said Adam.

Edgewood's biggest gripe with CEO is over losing the $5,000 or so in state money it gets for each student. But many in the district are equally concerned that the scholarships will strip Edgewood of its capable kids, leaving the district with even lower-achieving and less-motivated students.

That has not necessarily been the case. Citing some progress in the district, many parents decided to keep their children in Edgewood schools. At Perales Elementary, a low-achieving campus several years ago that now has high scores on the state's basic skills test, parent volunteer Maria Rodriguez says her second-grader, Kristel, is working at a third-grade level.

"She doesn't want to miss a day," said Rodriguez.

Still, Rodriguez wonders why Edgewood has yet to make good on two major construction projects the district promised Perales six years ago, and why this year the school's budget was slashed even while the district is building a costly performing arts campus, which so far has enrolled only 150 students.

The Edgewood district says maintenance work sidetracked these projects and promises that construction at Perales will begin next year.

But the frustration Rodriguez feels is not unlike that of del Rio, the mother who switched her two girls to private school. Only Rodriguez sees the CEO scholarships as a serious threat to Edgewood schools, while del Rio sees them as her kids' last best hope for an education.

Like vouchers, the $50 million scholarship program is probably neither. Researchers agree that relatively few people take advantage of school choice. For those who do, private school may offer a slightly better education.

As for school reform, the debate rages over what works best. Some argue that the solution is a more centralized control of curriculum. Others point to success of school districts like El Paso's Ysleta, where the former superintendent was given broad power to hire and fire and build an administrative team that shared his sense of mission.

A better way may be for the public to rise up and demand better results from all districts.

"We simply have to find a way of kicking butt," said Levin, the Stanford scholar. "Unless we become outraged, unless we build nothing short of a political movement, we're not going to change a thing."

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SCHOOL VOUCHERS MAY BE A TOOL TO HELP BUILD EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

TREVOR W. COLEMAN

Dr. Michael Nettles has spent most of his adult life in the field of education. A professor of education at the University of Michigan, he is one of the country's foremost scholars on public schools. As executive director of the Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute of the College Fund/UNCF, Nettles also is arguably America's top scholar on African-American education.

So when Nettles talks about public education, people listen. Lately, he has been talking about the state of inner-city schools and how it worries him - so much so that he now considers school vouchers a viable option for the many parents who are dissatisfied with the quality of their children's public schools.

"This doesn't suggest that all schools that are private are better than all schools that are public," Nettles said. "But in some cases, the choice for African-Americans is a poor school or no school at all.

"What I am suggesting is that we ought to provide another option for them - the choice of going to a good school. A school where they will improve their chances for a higher quality of life, including preparation for college."

Voucher systems generally allow families to take their children's share of the public money going to their local school district and channel it instead into a private school. In Michigan today, such a tax voucher would amount to about $5,400 per student a year.

In his role with the Patterson Institute, Nettles completed the most comprehensive study ever on the status of blacks in education, assembled this fall in a wonderful three-volume set of reference books. The study found that African-American students are as racially segregated today as they were at the time of the Brown vs. Board of Education decision in 1954. African Americans also remain underrepresented among students taking undergraduate college admissions tests. The research also shows that high school curricular choices appear to limit the success of African Americans on some standardized tests. African Americans taking the SAT test have typically done less academic course work and taken fewer honors courses than whites taking the SAT.

Nettles cites several factors behind this. One of the most troubling is that in predominantly African-American schools, 51 percent of the teachers are teaching courses that are outside of their college majors, and 25 percent are teaching courses they don't feel qualified to teach.

"You also have the problem of high absentee teacher rates, lots of substitute teachers, high school student non-attendance, high rates of crime, poor and rundown facilities, or no equipment and technology," Nettles said.

Nettles is not suggesting that there are no good public schools or that there is no hope for the poor ones. But he is saying that for most African-American children, schools are a in a crisis situation that requires an open mind about solutions, including vouchers.

What should concern public school advocates is that Nettles is not some right-wing ideologue or political activist with an agenda. He is a scholar who has made an objective observation that is shared by more and more people.

According to a 1997 Michigan Research Group survey, 75 percent of Detroit voters said they would vote yes for channeling their state education dollars toward private and parochial schools. That was the highest percentage of support anywhere in the state, according to Bryan Taylor, executive director of Teach Michigan Education Fund, a group advocating school choice.

That should come as no surprise. Two-thirds of Detroit public school students drop out before their senior year and, according to 1990 census data, about one-third of Detroit public school teachers do not send their own children to city schools.

The sad fact, which can be stated without bashing a lot of well-intentioned and hardworking people in Detroit, is that the city schools as a whole are failing young people, and the cost is enormous and long-term.

There is a belief that the answer is more public money. It is not. According to the Michigan Department of Education, for the 1996-97 school year, the Detroit school district spent $7,287 per pupil, compared to a statewide average of $6,507. Yet, only 29.7 percent of Detroit ninth-graders make it to high school graduation.

Part of the answer lies in raising the perception of the value of education. Some organizations are on the right track: The National Urban League, with its Nu-Lites academic achievement organization and its Thurgood Marshall Scholars, is doing this, as well as the NAACP ACT-SO (academic achievement olympics) and DAPCEP, the Detroit Area Pre-college Engineering Program, a mentoring effort sponsored by local businesses.

But it's going to take much more. It's going to take internal change in the operation of a school system that is supposed to serve 173,792 children, more involvement from parents, and more demands for performance from the schools and students. It's going to take intolerance from the community for bad schools. That already is manifest in the waiting lists for private and charter schools in Detroit.

National Urban League President Hugh Price says black folks are going to have to start thinking like consumers when it comes to education. If the product is of poor quality, shop elsewhere. And Price, Nettles and others have concluded, if that means vouchers, so be it.

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School Choice Isn't a New Idea

By Amity Shlaes

"After all, the scuttling of an essential democratic institution such as public education—imposing in its place a radical experiment called vouchers—is the very antithesis of what conservatism is all about."

—Bob Chase, president of the National Education Association

ST. JOHNSBURY, Vt.—Parents are all conservatives at heart, and the nation's voucher opponents have used this fact to a signal advantage. Whenever the voucher wars heat up, teachers unions and other foes set up the battle as a grand contest between Known and Unknown. The Known is our public schools, deficient as they may be. The Unknown is the fragile young voucher projects. And indeed, what parent wants to tie his child's fate to a risky proposition?

A parent who's been to St. Johnsbury, that's who. Here, lodged securely between mountains in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, stands a school as old and traditional as most any in the nation. Its boys don button-down broadcloth and ties for morning chapel. Its girls recite Virgil in the same halls where a young Calvin Coolidge, class of 1891, absorbed his Latin. Yet this school, the St. Johnsbury Academy, is also a voucher school, and has been one for well over a century. Indeed, it is a *thriving* voucher school: This decade, the academy marked its sesquicentennial by expanding its student body to 1,000 from 750.

"People say vouchers are experimental," says the rusty-haired headmaster, Bernier Mayo, as he leads a visitor to one of the school's Victorian mansions via a path of ancient Norway pines. "I don't know how you could get less experimental than this."

Another America

To spend a day strolling around the hilly campus is to be transported to another America—the America of the private community school. The academy is located downtown on Main Street, and it serves as the local high school for St. Johnsbury and many neighboring towns in the poorest corner of a poor state. It accepts any local student for a fee of $7,090 that the towns pay.

Yet St. Johnsbury is hardly your ordinary high school. Its vocational students tinker with giant school-bus engines and align truck axles in an elegant, cavernous garage. Its college-bound students study fourth-year Japanese. And its 10-to-1 student-teacher ratio has made it the envy of public schools for hundreds of miles around.

And because St. Johnsbury is not a public high school, it can do even more. Each year the school also takes in an additional hundred-odd boarder students from across America and overseas, students whose families daily on waiting lists for the privilege of seeing their children attend a good American high school. Two years ago St. Johnsbury's Russian pupils in the school's ham radio club chatted with cosmonauts aboard the space station Mir.

That this lovable anomaly exists in our bureaucratized, centralized era is an accident of history. In the early 1800s, well before public schools took root in our country, New England educators and philanthropists established academies in some rural towns. When the time came to build public schools, the so-called New England Academies were so well established that towns saw no need to repeat their work. Instead they agreed to a voucher arrangement with the academies called "tuitioning out."

St. Johnsbury is the most visible New England Academy but by no means the only one. Vermont has several others. The Maine town of Dover-Foxcroft has the Foxcroft Academy, established in 1823. But Mr. Mayo's model is worth studying, if only for the flair with which it disproves each one of voucher foes' arguments:

• *Voucher schools skim off the cream.* The Academy takes many handicapped and special education pupils, including children who will never read. Its vocational programs accept dozens who will never attend college. In one popular program, student carpenters build a complete house—and then sell it via the local realtor to raise funds for their shop program.

• *Voucher schools don't get better results.* St. Johnsbury Academy students perform

"Some of my very best teachers are straight out of college," says Mr. Mayo, uttering ed-school heresy. "Certification is irrelevant to us."

St. Johnsbury Academy

at the 90th percentile or above on Advanced Placement tests for English, European history, American history and biology. A larger percentage of its graduating seniors go on to college or further education than from any public high school in the state.

• *Voucher schools don't connect with the community.* Every day, dozens of townies enjoy free use of the school's luxurious weight room, its newly restored gymnasium and its competition-size pool—all structures paid for by private donations. Each September, the school offers St. Johnsbury's poorer families a gift one would be hard put to imagine coming from a public school: It buys school clothes and knapsacks for students who can't afford them. In 1996, townies packed the gymnasium to cheer on the school basketball team as it captured the state's Division I championship.

• *Voucher schools underpay teachers.* The starting salary at St. Johnsbury is $22,500, around the average for the region. Its master teachers and department heads earn up to $50,000, about the same as senior teachers in area public schools. The academy even offers special benefits to teachers that public schools don't: It pays 100% of tuition and costs for every teacher working towards a master's degree, and gives teachers a year's sabbatical at 80% salary every 12 years. The results of these attractions are piled up around Mr. Mayo's cherry-paneled office—1,000 résumés from teacher candidates. This at a time of nationwide teacher shortage.

• *Voucher schools will overcharge.* The academy's tuition level is currently below the average amount spent on public high school students in Vermont.

So what's the magic formula? The first answer: no teachers union. Mr. Mayo and fellow administrators can pick teachers they like, not the ones who have accumulated the requisite number of state qualifications. "Some of my very best teachers are straight out of college," says Mr. Mayo, uttering ed-school heresy. "Certification is irrelevant to us."

Another key is that St. Johnsbury isn't afraid to treat a school as what it should be—a multimillion-dollar firm that must serve customers to stay solvent. Every morning Mr. Mayo logs on to his computer to conduct business from his school Web site. At an August breakfast at a local restaurant, Mr. Mayo spots town business leaders at a neighboring table and walks over to chat. They mention that the region is confronting a shortage of machinists. Right away, the headmaster starts laying plans to reinstate an old machinists' course.

In summer, the school earns extra cash for its coffers by conducting an Advanced Placement Institute for high schoolers from across the state who want to improve their scores on standardized tests for college entrance. In winter it welcomes its foreign students, whose families pay $22,000 a year for their children's stay at St. Johnsbury. Mr. Mayo recalls that in 1980s, he and his admissions director traveled to Asia to make cold calls for students. The results of one trip would please any entrepreneur: A $12,000 voyage raised $1 million in fresh tuition money.

Keeping busybody government officials out of the schools' affairs has also been crucial to St. Johnsbury's success. In the 1980s, for example, the American Civil Liberties Union sought to launch a suit against one of the school's most treasured traditions—the morning chapel session, which included a moment of silence. The ACLU could find no candidate to lend his name to the complaint. Perceiving that their school's independence was at stake, students, faculty and alumni closed rank against the outsiders.

Fresh Challenges

In 1998 the Academy is facing fresh challenges. The state's courts and its Democratic legislators have put through a bill centralizing property tax revenues and reducing all school funding to a flat $5,100 per student—a rate insufficient for St. Johnsbury's programs. And this term, the U.S. Supreme Court is expected to rule on the constitutionality of Milwaukee's program extending vouchers to parochial school students—a decision that could touch St. Johnsbury.

On the wall of the same chapel that rankled the ACLU hangs a quote from President Coolidge: "If the spirit of liberty should vanish in the union and our institutions should languish, it all could be replenished from the generous store held by the people in this brave little State of Vermont." Flowery words, but ones that certainly should inspire the nation's voucher movement as it ponders the St. Johnsbury model. As Vermont goes, so may the nation.

Miss Shlaes is a member of the Journal's editorial board.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Standards, Tests & Accountability

Now that practically everyone claims to favor education accountability, it's time to tackle the specifics: how does a state or district implement a workable accountability system? What happens when students fail in droves? Will adults ever really be held accountable for results? Answers are starting to appear.

First up in this section is the *Washington Post's* veteran education writer, Jay Mathews, whose perceptive article, "Take Out Your No. 2 Pencils," delves into the issue of standardized testing. He explores how these tests have become the universal measure of achievement for students and schools alike. He tracks one family's struggle with the test, and reminds us that fundamental school reforms—like accountability—have a real impact on people's lives, for good and for ill. Mathews then joins with Valerie Strauss to report that "Stanford 9 Tests Reform Style of Instruction." It seems that Washington teachers are taking the new standards and tests seriously, too.

Next we bring you Herbert J. Walberg's "Incentivized School Standards Work" from *Education Week*. He suggests using incentives to encourage achievement on the part of teachers and students. Policymakers seem to be listening, at least in England. According to reporter Tim Miles in "Cash for Schools Could be Based on Results" from *The Press Association Limited*, government ministers (in the Labor Party, no less) have proposed basing the teacher salary structure and school funding formula on performance results.

"A Teacher's View of Accountability," an original submission by Paul Zoch, casts some doubts on teacher-focused accountability schemes. Zoch argues that teachers alone cannot be held accountable for student achievement. For students to succeed, he argues, they themselves must be willing to do what is necessary to succeed.

Stephen Hegarty's article for *The St. Petersburg Times*, "Brogan Will Raise Stakes for Schools," discusses the Florida Lieutenant Governor's (and former Education Commissioner's) plan to make the state's schools more accountable. Brogan has decided to raise the bar on school performance, making it more difficult for schools to avoid the 'low-performing' label. This decision comes after news that the initial 158 schools labeled 'low-performing' three years ago showed significant improvements, enough to remove them from the list. Perhaps New York City schools' chancellor Rudy Crew could learn a thing or two. According to the *New York Times* article, "List of Failing Schools in City Grows Larger" by Anemona Hartocollis, more schools were added to than removed from the list of failing schools this year in the Big Apple.

An example from England also offers a possible solution for dealing with troubled schools. John Clare's article, "Failing School to be Put Into Private Sector" from *The Daily Telegraph*, shows strict accountability in action. One such school will be reconstituted and handed over to a private management company. (America's Edison Project has made a bid.)

Jerry Jesness, an elementary school teacher from Los Fresnos, Texas submitted the original piece, "The Tail that Wags the Standards Dog." Jesness analyzes the substantial increase in scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), a trend that he attributes to teaching to the test and schools concentrating on the subjects that are tested. He doubts that the rise in scores results from a real increase in student learning, since Texas's SAT and ACT scores remain some of the lowest in the nation. Texas officials seem to be responding to such criticisms. According to Robert Johnston's *Education Week* article, "Commissioner Calls for Expanding Texas Assessments," Texas plans to test students more often and in more subjects. At least that way "teaching to the test" will result in a better-rounded curriculum!

SMF

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TAKE OUT YOUR No. 2 PENCILS

By JAY MATHEWS
PHOTOGRAPHS by KOLIN SMITH

STANDARDIZED TESTS LIKE THE STANFORD 9 ARE THE RAGE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION. BUT DO THEY REALLY MEASURE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, OR SIMPLY REFLECT COLLECTIVE ANXIETY ABOUT OUR SCHOOLS?

When the long envelope arrived from her son Darius's elementary school last fall, Charlette Hedgman reacted slowly and carefully. She knew the thickly numbered columns on the two enclosed sheets were bad news, but she did not raise her voice with Darius or threaten punishment. That was not the way she raised her son. Hiding her disappointment, she sat and thought about what she wanted to say.

On the double-sided sheets, in beige-colored boxes with a light blue border, were the results of the Stanford Achievement Test Series, Ninth Edition, for Darius Q. Leggette, student No. 8276447, age 8 yrs., 01 mos. The sweet-tempered boy with the incandescent grin was beginning second grade at the Ketcham Elementary School, a ramshackle assemblage of brick buildings at the foot of 15th Street SE in Anacostia. The report listed 133 indicators, many as incomprehensible as a corporate tax return, but Hedgman was a classroom aide at another District elementary school. She knew what this meant.

In all six areas of performance—total reading, vocabulary, reading comprehension, total mathematics, problem solving and procedures—Darius had re-

ceived the lowest rating: "below basic." The sheets of paper told her this categorization "indicates little or no mastery of fundamental knowledge and skills." Hedgman didn't know it at the time, but almost half of Darius's classmates at Ketcham Elementary scored equally poorly on the reading portion of the test.

Charlette Hedgman did not think Darius had too little intelligence. She thought he had too much energy and impatience. He tried to do everything hastily—he was the kind of child who liked to stampede through the living room and leap down the six steps in front of their brick town house. In 1996 he had dashed into the middle of Good Hope Road, two blocks from the house, directly in front of a big burgundy sedan. He spent a month at Children's Hospital. She never wanted to go through that again.

She adjusted the papers and called Darius over to sit with her on the Queen Anne couch with the flowered upholstery. The muscles of his small face tightened. The couch meant serious business. She showed him the report.

"This is how you did," she said. She pulled him close. "You could do better, but I'm not mad. I think we're just going to have to work a little harder."

Darius peered at the two sheets of paper. There were 27 separate content categories. He was below average in 21. Hedgman had to squint to read the fine print on the back. It said that RS/NP/NA meant Raw Score/Number Possible/Number Attempted. Darius had worked hard at the test, answering nearly every question, even if many of his answers were wrong. His energy and time had finally run out on the "Word Reading" section, where he had answered only 11 of the 30 questions.

The report gave no encouragement, not even the usual bureaucratic concession that one test could not define a child. Seven thick bars, crawling like black worms across the page, said Darius was no higher than the 24th percentile on any indicator. At least 75 percent of the national sample of second graders were ahead of him. On Word Reading he was at the absolute bottom, the 1st percentile, all the rest of the world looking down on him.

Hedgman could see her son was shaken. She tried to be positive. She told him he could do better on the test; it would just take some time and effort, and a few new rules. She began to formulate a plan.

All over the District—and, indeed, the nation—households were receiving similar packets. In the last two decades standardized tests have become one of the most powerful forces in American education. Psychometrics, the science of measuring the mind, pervades the academic world. Few districts dare to conclude a school year without requiring students to spend several hours filling in circles and rectangles on computerized scoring sheets with No. 2 pencils. The companies that market such tests are approaching $200 million in annual sales, evidence of a boom that by all indications shows no sign of abating.

The tests have become a universal measure of success in the world of public education. Principals and teachers are given bonuses or fired. Students are promoted or forced to repeat grades, placed in programs for the gifted or dispatched to special ed, and some are denied graduation. All occur because of what the indicators and the bar graphs and the pie charts reveal.

In this results-oriented, parent-sensitive environment, no experiment in teaching children can thrive without a test that says it is working. There does not have to be any proven connection between a rise in test scores and the program in question. But the advocates of the new idea have to be able to point to some upward trend in numbers, or they cannot get very far.

Most states have at least one testing program in place, and many have several. School districts in South Carolina can be declared educationally bankrupt and subject to state takeover if their test scores fall below a certain level. Districts in Michigan can lose their accreditation for the same reason.

California administered the largest standardized testing program in the country last spring to more than 4 million students at a cost of $35 million and posted school-by-school results on the World Wide Web. Several districts sued unsuccessfully to prevent the release of scores for limited-English students. The state Department of Education has proposed paying cash awards of 5 to 10 percent of teachers' annual salaries to schools with high or much improved scores. Schools that fail to do well could have their entire staffs transferred or face closure.

Standardized tests have long been a fact of life in public education. For half a century, according to educational historian Sherman Dorn at the University of South Florida, achievement tests were administered and scored, their results confined largely to the internal consumption of teachers, parents and children. What is different now is that the tests have become a public measuring and punishing stick. Parents and voters want the results disclosed and are quick to seek comparisons between various schools and districts. The media have jumped in, treating test results as a major news story.

"In less than 25 years, statistical accountability has become so ubiquitous that it appears inevitable," says Dorn, who calls the change "both breathtaking and alarming."

What bothers Dorn and other critics is that tests have gone from being one possible measure of academic achievement to being the *only* measure that really counts. The pressures on school officials, teachers and students to do well on the test have increased dramatically. This has led some schools to emphasize practicing for the tests over real learning, critics argue. Some school officials seem to have gone even further, searching for

ways to beat the system by selectively choosing who takes the test and who doesn't, in order to raise their school's average scores.

In D.C., former school chief executive Julius W. Becton Jr. and his successor, superintendent Arlene Ackerman, have decreed that standardized tests will be the ultimate criteria for Darius Leggette and 73,000 other public schoolchildren. Principals who do not raise their schools' scores significantly have been told they may lose their jobs. Students who do not improve have been required to attend summer school. Children with scores as low as Darius's face the prospect of having to repeat the same grade.

These officials are responding to what they see as a crisis of confidence in the District's education system. Overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers, decaying buildings and unprepared and uninspired students all have contributed to the city's educational meltdown. Its standardized test scores are among the worst in the country, its dropout rate among the highest. On the average, every year that a student spends in the system, his or her scores go down. About 70 percent of high school juniors test below grade level.

To measure how their students were really doing, District officials decided they had neither the time nor money to develop a sophisticated, performance- and curriculum-based test like those that have come into use in Maryland and Virginia. Instead, they turned to one of the most popular, widely used and economical standardized tests in the nation.

The Stanford Achievement Test Series, Ninth Edition—known far and wide as the Stanford 9 or SAT9—was designed 1,600 miles from the District in a sprawling office complex in the San Antonio residential neighborhood of Collins Gardens, using many buildings that had once been Levi Strauss warehouses. This is the headquarters of Harcourt Brace Educational Measurement Inc., the company that writes and markets the Stanford 9. HBEM's test—considered the first standardized achievement test in America—dates back three-quarters of a century. The SAT9—which has no affiliation with the Educational Testing Service's SAT given to college-bound high school students—has the respect of many educators, the backing of a major textbook publisher, and a marketing philosophy that seeks to capitalize on its long history.

Some of that history is less than distinguished. The co-founder of the SAT9 series, Stanford University psychologist Lewis Terman, began his celebrated half-century of work on the mysteries of intelligence with some of the most racist and elitist speculations ever found in 20th-century academia. Harvard University science historian and paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould, in his 1981 book *The Mismeasure of Man*, *continued on page 25* unearthed malodorous chunks of early Terman, such as his admiration for the intellectual superiority of Anglo-Saxons.

In 1916 in his seminal book, *The Measurement of Intelligence*, Terman bemoaned the ignorance of a conscientious mother of a child who had just scored 75 on the professor's rudimentary IQ test. "Strange to say, the mother is encouraged and hopeful because she sees that her boy is learning to read," Terman wrote. His own conclusion: The boy "is feeble-minded; he will never complete the grammar school; he will never be an efficient worker or a responsible citizen." Similar tests assigned most immigrant Jews of that era to the feeble-minded category.

Terman later disowned his early fascination with race-based intelligence, and by 1937 had acknowledged that how a child was raised had a significant impact on how well he or she did on the tests. Terman did not quite know what it was he was measuring, but he continued to refine the yardstick. The Stanford-Binet intelligence test that he co-authored has lived on, a controversial device still used in assigning children to gifted classes, even though critics contend it is culturally biased and underestimates the intelligence of ethnic minorities.

The achievement tests developed by Terman and others at Stanford have a somewhat different goal—to measure how much children absorb of what school teaches them, and to help educators see how each child measures up against the American average.

Constructing tests such as the Stanford 9 is like erecting a high wire in such a way that when children try to walk across it, half fall on one side and half on the other. The test-makers cull textbooks and nationally circulated lesson plans for questions that reflect what is most widely taught in American schools, giving their product what specialists call "content validity."

For the test to give parents and teachers an idea of where each student fits on the national spectrum, the test-makers have to choose questions that, in the jargon of psychometrics, "behave properly." The best questions are those that half of the students miss. Some questions can be easier and some harder, but psychometricians try to avoid those that 90 percent of the students get wrong or right.

If a disproportionate number of people with low total scores get a given question right, or a disproportionate number with high scores get it wrong, that also is a problem. It might mean that one of the "distracters," the psychometric name for the wrong answers to a multiple-choice question, is causing too many high scorers to make a mistake or giving too many low

scorers too easy a route to the correct answer. The distracters are there to trick the uncertain student into getting the question wrong, otherwise the scores will not break down into the bell-shaped curve that reflects most students scoring in the middle, with a few at the high and low ends.

The troubling aspects of this practice hit Fairfax-based educational consultant Gerald W. Bracey when he was helping teach a freshman psychology course at Stanford. Bracey, who went on to become chief assessment officer for Virginia's public schools and is author of *Put to the Test*, a consumer's guide to testing, was ordered to grade on the curve at Stanford so that 15 percent received A's and 15 percent D's or F's. His students were among the brightest in the country. Many of them had never seen anything less than an A on their high school report cards. Instead of testing them on the course's main points, Bracey had to trick them into committing errors by formulating improbably subtle questions or making references to obscure footnotes.

To achieve their own bell curve, the makers of the Stanford 9 have to build in the same kind of tricks. They justify these devices as part of the educational process. A student who truly knows the subject matter, they argue, will step lightly around the traps.

Bracey contends that the search for questions that address only lessons taught in the majority of school districts has an important drawback: It has inhibited educators from trying innovations that don't show an immediate payoff in higher test scores or that might put their young test-takers at a disadvantage. The Coalition of Essential Schools, an effort to revive secondary schools through deeper courses and less test-conscious assessments, has won enthusiastic reviews from many parents, students and educators. But some districts have lost interest in the coalition's program, in part because it has failed to improve test scores as quickly as they had hoped.

"It would be very hard to overestimate the importance of tests in the United States today," says Bracey. "And yet they often inhibit educational innovations that try to widen what children learn, because they measure a very small range of skills, usually verbal and math, and there are many other things in the world."

Despite the flaws and the critics, the tests and their results have taken firm hold in the public consciousness. Newspapers began headlining lowered standardized test scores in the mid-1970s, quoting experts and politicians who claimed that the results confirmed an alarming erosion in the nation's schools. A series of national reports in the early 1980s demanded higher standards in public schools. The standardized test industry began its two-decade boom.

The big three companies, each part of a major publishing firm, are CTB/McGraw-Hill, with $95 million in annual sales, and the two runners-up, HBEM and Riverside Publishing, owned by Houghton Mifflin & Co. Although No. 2 in sales, HBEM is pushing its leading rival hard. The Stanford 9 replaced a CTB/McGraw-Hill product in the District and a Riverside product in Virginia last year after HBEM executives convinced school officials their test had a longer track record and was more in tune with the curriculums. In California, HBEM won the largest testing contract in the state's history despite a recommendation from the superintendent of public instruction in favor of CTB/McGraw-Hill's Terra Nova series. Economics is also a factor. HBEM charges the District just $12 per test for the Stanford 9, a total of $636,000 for the 53,000 students who were tested last spring.

Today the Stanford 9 is used in at least 17 states and the District of Columbia, although D.C. uses it in more grades and more frequently than many other school districts. In the District, the full version of the test is used, allowing teachers to identify particular strengths and weaknesses in each child. Virginia is using an abbreviated version, which allows parents to see how their children compare generally to a national norm. Maryland does not use the Stanford 9. It periodically gives the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, a CTB/McGraw-Hill exam, to a few students in each district to check them against a national sample.

The Stanford 9 is a norm-referenced test, designed to show how a student compares to a national sample of students. But HBEM is also producing criterion-referenced tests. The latter are designed to demonstrate how much a student has learned of a specific course curriculum, such as Virginia's new, fact-rich Standards of Learning program. District officials are using a version of the Stanford 9 that also serves as a criterion-referenced test, with a panel of experts deciding how low a score must be to indicate that a student like Darius has not reached a basic level of learning.

HBEM has the contract to write and score the new Virginia tests and is working on similar projects in other states. But despite its growing success and influence, the company remains so unaccustomed to public notice that it declined a Washington Post request to visit its San Antonio headquarters, saying it had never before been asked to let a reporter inside. Instead, company officials consented to telephone interviews for this story.

Not only have standardized tests become a required part of nearly every school district's spring calendar, but the publishing houses that market them are also developing and selling guides and textbooks designed to help students pass. Some have even started to dabble in tutoring services to assure worried parents that they are doing everything they can to make sure their children succeed. It's a huge potential market; in effect the companies are addressing the parental anxieties that they themselves have helped create.

Within days of receiving Darius's test results, Charlette Hedgman had formulated her plan. Henceforth, she decreed, there would be no TV on weekdays. The hour from 4 to 5 p.m. would be study time. Nothing would happen in that hour unrelated to homework. She and Darius would read together every evening, on the same couch, slowing down the process of absorption so that the words would remain in his brain overnight.

She could tell he viewed this as one long prison sentence. But what was she to do? She understood the power of tests, just as she understood how difficult they could be for those who were unprepared. When she was Darius's age, she had also attended Ketcham Elementary. She could remember staring at a standardized test and feeling her mind freeze shut. In class she usually knew the answers, at least for that day's lesson. But the words and concepts slipped away. There was little review. A test that demanded she recall a year's worth of work brought terror.

She received a guide for parents distributed by the District, but found it was sometimes contradictory. Page 4 of "Stanford 9: How Parents Can Help Their Children," for instance, said, "Students who score below a certain level will be held back and required to attend six weeks of summer school." But page 6 said the scores would only be "one of the indicators used" and "teachers and principals will have the final say on summer school and promotion."

Still, many of the recommendations in the guide made sense to Hedgman: Answer all of your child's questions, encourage your child to read at least two books a month, and turn off the TV. Hedgman followed those guidelines and felt Darius was making progress. She had pushed him to read more books than that in the past, but she realized that too often he had whipped through them—loving the speed but failing to comprehend what he was reading. She found he learned more if they went more slowly.

Darius spent the winter reading. A tutor, someone his mother knew from school, worked with him occasionally. At home, Hedgman made certain he read to her at least an hour each evening, even when she could barely keep her eyes open after a day of rustling kindergartners. He seemed to

be getting it. He was growing accustomed to the routine of TV-less weekdays. His vocabulary was increasing. His reading comprehension improved.

The work that Darius was doing at home reinforced the efforts that were taking place in the classroom. In Room 212 at Ketcham Elementary, every hour of class included an exercise devoted to reading and writing. Darius's second-grade teacher, Florine English, posted new terms on the Word Wall, and displayed illustrated student stories in the hallway just outside her glass-windowed door. Phonics were pushed hard. The school's principal, Romaine Thomas, had been at Ketcham 25 years. She believed that decoding the sounds of each word helped children absorb their meaning and their use.

Some of Darius's work went up on the light-green cinder-block walls of the classroom, where he would stand and admire his progress. Often at lunch time English would give him an extra 15 minutes, taking him through a recent lesson to make sure he understood.

English says she believes all her books and charts and teaching devices were of help to Darius. But when asked about the child, the first thing she says is: "He has a very supportive mother."

Nonetheless, Charlette Hedgman felt a mounting sense of frustration as she investigated the District's use of the Stanford 9. The test-makers refused to let the children and teachers see the graded tests—that would require them to create an entire set of new questions every year, they argued, and make it impossible to match D.C. scores with the Stanford 9's national sample. Instead, Hedgman had to settle for a brochure that outlined the learning goals for each test. She saw immediately that these did not always match what was being taught in the schools. For example, the test demanded a form of multiplication that was not taught until the following grade. The fall test on which Darius had done so poorly had been given less than a month after school started. That was not long enough, Hedgman felt, to build him back up after a summer of games and television. How could they say all these numbers represented her son's level of achievement? He was already multiplying in his head, by a process that made sense to him. Yet the test said he could not adequately add or subtract. How could that be?

Hedgman's doubts were new to her but not to the debate over standardized testing. Critics around the country have been raising them for years.

John Katzman graduated from Princeton University in 1981. After six weeks on Wall Street, he was bored and disheartened, eager to set his own standards instead of the Dow's. He had worked with a small admissions-test-coaching school in college. His parents lent him $3,000 to set up his own operation in their New York apartment.

Today he is the president of the Princeton Review, a $50 million-a-year test-preparation company with 500 locations. His success stems from his knack for unlocking the secrets of standardized tests, particularly the college applicant's worst nightmare, the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). So presumably he should be fond of the high stakes exams and national obsession with testing that have made him wealthy.

In fact, Katzman has an almost thermonuclear distaste for standardized testing of any kind. On the telephone from his office in Manhattan, Katzman slides into his anti-test stump speech, an acidic riff on overanxious parents and cowardly bureaucrats. These are people, he says, who can no longer recall the time when they were in school and their parents judged the value of their educations by little more than how much homework they were assigned each night.

"The Stanford 9 conceptually is no better and no worse than any other nationally standardized test," Katzman says. "What is problematic is the value assigned to the test."

The 175 questions on Darius Leggette's three-hour reading and arithmetic test can only dimly reflect what he learned in first grade, Katzman argues, but that is all that is necessary to consign him to the bottom of the scholastic heap. And if he manages to crawl his way up to the basic level, where he will be allowed to move to the next grade, it will only mean he will have chosen different answers to a handful of questions, hardly deepening the understanding that his education is supposed to be about.

With the Stanford 9 and other standardized tests used in elementary schools, says Katzman, "the test-writers don't know what the kid is learning, the students, parents and teachers don't know the process or have any access to old tests, and the general public makes important decisions about policies and people on the basis of deeply flawed numbers."

Just as failure on a standardized test may not be as significant as it seems, success may also mean less. Fairfax consultant Gerald Bracey notes that in the early 1980s Prince George's County schools received much praise for their annual improvement in test scores. Critics raised questions about classes that appeared to focus on little but strategies for passing the test. But their views were overlooked until a few years later, when the state of Maryland adopted a new test. Scores dropped statewide, as often happens with a new test, but in Prince George's they plummeted.

The curious fact is that when it comes to the question of how test results are used, the people who design and market the Stanford 9 and its sister exams do not necessarily disagree with their critics.

Joanne Lenke is president of HBEM and chief defender of the Stanford 9. She is a prominent psychometrician, part of a direct intellectual lineage back to Terman. Her professor at Syracuse University, Eric Gardner, was a student of T.L. Kelly, one of the other co-designers of the first Stanford Achievement Test. Lenke is also a former junior high school math teacher who says she understands exactly how much her carefully calibrated, lovingly drafted tests can be stretched out of shape by school board members eager for a cheap, quick fix.

"The original reason that norm-referenced tests were developed was to identify relative strengths and weaknesses of students in the classroom," Lenke says. "They were never intended to make personnel decisions . . . I know it is done, and certainly test scores could be one indicator of performance, but I would argue that visiting the classroom and observing the teacher, looking at the day-to-day instructional activities, would be far more useful."

Rating schools or holding back children because of poor Stanford 9 scores does not please her. The test is there to tell a parent and a teacher how each child compares to a representative sample of American children, not whether the principal should be rehired or the child forced to repeat a grade. Test-makers, she says, have no more power to prevent customers from abusing the test than the automobile industry is able to ban lovemaking in back seats.

Still, Lenke defends the concept of accountability that lies behind standardized tests. Parents and teachers cannot serve a student well unless they know what the child understands and what he doesn't. A child will nod and say he knows a certain word because he wants to get outside to play on the jungle gym. Only by some objective test, such as putting the word in front of him and requiring him to choose from four alternative meanings, can the real extent of his knowledge be judged. "Testing has become very important to our society," Lenke says, "because it is a way we can together gather information to make important educational decisions."

D.C. school officials were well aware of the arguments for and against standardized testing, and many of them had little enthusiasm for the Stanford 9. But faced with an educational crisis of massive proportion, they felt they had little choice but to turn to HBEM's test. It became for them a form of shock therapy designed to awaken principals, teachers, parents and students to a dreary reality no one seemed prepared to face.

The first round of Stanford 9 tests in the District was held in May 1997, and the results were predictably catastrophic. Overall scores in both reading and math were disappointingly low. Nearly 4,000 tests were not even scored because students had answered too few questions. The political and fiscal implications were hard to miss in a city whose budget is in the hands of a Republican-controlled Congress. "The average D.C. student can't read this letter!" declared a missive to the House of Representatives in large bold type from Rep. Charles Taylor, the North Carolina Republican who chairs the House Appropriations subcommittee on the District. The test results, he wrote, proved that the "D.C. public school system is failing virtually every young life it is responsible for."

Many parents were equally shocked by the results. But some felt that the school system effectively had herded their children into the middle of I-395—subjecting them without proper preparation to a test that they could not possibly pass.

"We had to make a decision about what was in the best interests of children," says Patricia A. Anderson, the District's interim director of educational accountability, looking back on what happened. A veteran of two decades of working on D.C. tests, she says she understands the bruised feelings of parents but believes the District had no choice. "Maybe it wasn't the most comfortable position to take, but we felt that in order to get our kids where they needed to be we had to shock the public and parents into understanding their kids are not getting the skills that they are going to need and this is what we have to do."

City officials informed principals that 50 percent of their evaluation would depend upon their school's performance in the next round of Stanford 9 testing. Parents were told to become more concerned and involved in their children's education.

Having gotten everyone's attention, school officials set out to prepare teachers and students for the next round of tests. The mobilization took months to organize. By last winter, many schools were deeply into crash programs of preparation. At Langdon Elementary in Northeast Washington, teachers spent 2½ hours daily drilling students for multiple-choice tests, part of a "We Push" campaign. At Wilson Senior High School, students spent two hours a week practicing multiple-choice math and reading questions.

While Charlette Hedgman and Darius were hard at work on his reading and math skills at home, principal Romaine Thomas was lighting a flame under the faculty and students at Ketcham. Thomas held after-school training sessions for teachers and placed posters on the hallway walls setting "A Performance Standard for Reading." Each student was assigned to read 25 books or the equivalent every school year, with at least five different authors and three different literary styles. A series of test-taking tips were also posted: Don't spend too much time on any one question, pay attention to directions, eliminate those answers you know are incorrect before guessing, mark items to return to if time permits. Ketcham also adopted the Drop Everything and Read program. Each child was required to have a 90-minute reading session at school every day.

Many students in the District were dismayed by the new emphasis on testing. On a chilly February morning this past winter about 100 students at Cardozo High School's Transportation and Technology Academy gathered in the bright yellow basement cafeteria for a special assembly. After speakers spoke and awards were handed out, academy coordinator Shirley C. McCall broached the delicate subject of the tests.

"I want to explain to you how important the Stanford 9 is," she said. Ninth, 10th and 11th graders would be taking the test in April. "The Stanford Achievement Test will be a barometer," she said. "It will mean whether or not you will be able to get to the next grade level. Please take the test seriously. In the near future, students who do not pass the Stanford 9 test will not be able to graduate with a diploma."

There was an unhappy buzz among the students, who were some of the most motivated and hardest working in the school. A teacher, Emma Stephens, asked for questions, unleashing a torrent of resentment. "How come the seniors are not penalized on the Stanford 9 test?" asked Shawnice Palmer, winner of an award for best grade point average in the junior class.

Candie Parrish, another high-achieving junior, answered in a stage whisper: "They're more stupid than we are."

Stephens begged for calm. "We have a lot of tests. It is not designed to penalize you. Let me say this to you, Shawnice. We are talking about standards across the country, and the Stanford 9 reflects the standards we are talking about."

The mobilization campaign had an effect. When students throughout the system took the test again last April, the results seemed to show across-the-board improvements. At every grade level fewer students scored "below basic" in both math and reading. The biggest gains in reading came from the lowest-performing students in second and fourth grades, whose scores jumped 11 percentage points. In math, lowest-performing sixth- and eighth-graders improved by 12 points.

But a closer look revealed some odd discrepancies, the most glaring of which concerned the number of students who took the test. Of the 104 elementary schools in the District, 28 reported a drop of at least 30 students—in most cases about 10 percent or more of the total—being tested in reading compared with the year before. District school officials say they need to complete a review of scores from special-education and limited-English students, but they think the number of 1997 test-takers was mistakenly inflated. There have been unconfirmed reports in the past that some schools have intentionally culled poor students from the flock of test takers, but there is no evidence that any of the schools in D.C. did anything unethical to improve their scores. Still, such declines ring alarms among psychometricians. Increasing the number of test-takers tends to lower scores, while decreasing the number raises them.

Of the 28 schools that reported a decline in the number of reading test-takers, 19 showed an improvement in scores. One of the most impressive improvements occurred at Thomson Elementary in Northwest Washington. Thomson scored highest of the District's 41 lowest-income elementary schools. Only 12.5 percent of its students scored "below basic" in reading, whereas the four low-income schools with the worst results had from 40 to 50 percent of their students scoring "below basic."

But Thomson also had one of the sharpest declines in test-takers. The number of students in grades one through six changed very little, from 300 in 1997 to 291 in 1998. But the number listed as taking the Stanford 9 reading test dropped from 238 last year to 144 this year, a decline of nearly 40 percent. At the same time, the percentage of students scoring "below basic" dropped from 18 percent to 12 percent, a 33 percent improvement. The percentage of students scoring at the proficient level in reading increased 17 percent and the percentage scoring at the advanced level increased more than 140 percent.

Thomson principal Robert Bracy III, a well-regarded educator with 16 years at the school, says the improvement was the result of a hard-working, committed staff and an emphasis on phonics in a school where the majority of children are from immigrant Hispanic and Asian families. He says he does not know why the number of students taking the test has dropped, but he thought there might have been an increase in the number of children designated as non-English-speaking and exempted from the test.

Figures supplied by Sheryl Hamilton, project coordinator for data evaluation in the D.C. schools office of bilingual education, indicate the opposite is true. Last year, she says, her office told the school that 105 of its students should not take the test. This year that number dropped to 77. Patricia Anderson says many Thomson students who took the test in 1997 should not have been counted because they had limited English or other disabilities. The District's test experts took this into account, she says, and concluded that Thomson's improvement was real and not a statistical fluke.

The decline in test-takers at other schools remains a mystery, but teachers and administrators do not seem interested in delving into it too deeply. That attitude reflects a general sense of resignation regarding the tests. Parental concerns and political demands force them to release scores each year. Superintendent Ackerman's staff not only did that, but it provided enough detail to raise doubts about the validity of the schools' average scores. Ackerman says she plans to raise the issue of testing all children with the principals, but many administrators appear too busy to worry much about it.

In the same fashion, principals in the District show little enthusiasm for Ackerman's announcement that scores will count as 50 percent of their evaluations. But they recognize that is the way educators are assessed these days. Sheila Ford, principal at Mann Elementary for the last nine years, was in Memphis recently, where, she was told, test scores count for 60 percent on principal evaluations. "It is a backlash," she says. "People have not been accountable. Their feet have not been held to the fire. There have been some drastic reactions to that failure."

Michael Feuer, a D.C. parent who also heads the testing and assessment board at the National Academy of Sciences, echoes the feelings of many parents and teachers about the Stanford 9. "One needs to apply more than a single test score to decisions such as grade retention or firing a principal," he says. "I'm not saying the test has no role to play, but you need to be cautious." Ackerman says she plans to have a new test tailored to the D.C. curriculum—including a writing assessment—in place for grades three, five, eight and 10 by the 1999-2000 school year.

The point, says Sheila Ford, is to help children learn better and more. If the scores can help, no matter how erratic or annoying or misleading they can be, they will be used.

Charlette Hedgman received the spring Stanford 9 results for Darius in May. The two sheets of paper looked as dense and chilly as the fall report had. But many of the black bars and check marks had shifted in a promising direction.

She sat on the couch and studied them. Last fall Darius had scored "below average" on 21 indicators. This time all but six of those check marks had moved to the average column. In the fall he had been "below basic" on all six main subtests. This time he moved up to "basic" in the three reading categories, although he was still "below basic" in mathematics. The nightly reading hour had proved its worth.

"You did much better," she told Darius. "But we still have some work to do." She told him he would have to go to summer school, as a new school policy required.

Despite all of Hedgman's doubts about the test, it appeared to have moved Darius along, just as its makers in San Antonio and the administrators on North Capitol Street had hoped.

Whatever its flaws, it had been a useful guide in motivating one child to spend more time with his books. His mother and teacher had taken the Stanford 9 and the fears and uncertainties it generated, and had used them as best they could. There was no question Darius had learned a great deal in second grade. They could see it, with or without the test.

Working in the carpeted, air-conditioned learning areas of Terrell Elementary's summer school, Darius spent weeks doing math games and quizzes and more reading. The well-funded special session, a crucial part of Ackerman's new focus on achievement, included extra classroom aides. Darius had 14-year-old Christopher Henry, a high school sophomore, to take him through his exercises. Like Darius's mother, Christopher marveled at the boy's ability to multiply but not add. They focused on addition.

The summer report card reached Charlette Hedgman at the end of July. It said Darius had improved in all areas. He had escaped retention and would be on his way to third grade.

Hedgman watched him dash gleefully away. She would get him to sit down and read soon. She still didn't like the clumsy way the tests were applied, but she had the rhythm now. The summer mathematics teacher had put it exactly right at the end of the report card: "Don't work too fast, but take your time, concentrate and apply yourself." ■

The Washington Post, November 23, 1998

Stanford 9 Tests Reform Style of D.C. Instruction

By Jay Mathews
and Valerie Strauss
Washington Post Staff Writers

The 19 sixth-graders in Susan Schaeffler's classroom at Shepherd Elementary School in Northwest Washington leaned eagerly toward the blackboard. Many wanted to dislodge Ashley Tolbert, the tall girl in the bright-colored turtleneck who had been the class Math Queen for three straight days.

Schaeffler gave them six problems, including 3.54 divided by 6, and (5+6)x2+4 divided by 2. Tolbert won again in a close race of minds and pencils. Another district might have permitted calculators, the grade school generation's favorite tool, but not this D.C. school.

"The Stanford 9 doesn't allow calculators," Schaeffler explained.

Once again, the Stanford 9, short for the Stanford Achievement Test Series Ninth Edition, is helping to set the style and pace of instruction in D.C. schools. Having given their students a battery of Stanford 9 reading and mathematics tests in September and October, teachers at all 146 schools are focusing intense effort on the Stanford 9 barrage set for the spring.

Few other school districts in the country have put such emphasis on one series of tests. Principals have been told that their annual evaluation will depend on how well their students do. Students face the prospect of summer school if their scores aren't high enough.

At C.W. Harris Elementary in Southeast Washington, second-grade teacher Rheutelia Sizer put 18 pupils through one exercise after another—story reading, work-sheet coloring, pronunciation checking—to teach long and short vowel sounds. "All these skills are to prepare you for the Stanford 9 test," she said. The students nodded solemnly, having heard this before.

Some schools have test-taking tips, such as leaving the hard questions for last, posted on their walls. Time devoted to reading, key to success in both the reading and math parts of the tests, has been expanded in many classrooms.

The emphasis on the Stanford 9, used in at least 17 states, is part of an effort by School Superintendent Arlene Ackerman to instill accountability in the long-troubled system and raise test scores that for years have been among the worst in the country. Many D.C. educators and parents like the approach; some do not.

Ackerman said recently that she is requiring schools to improve test scores in each of the Stanford 9 categories: 10 percent improvement from below basic to basic, 5 percent from basic to proficient, and 5 percent from proficient to advanced. A majority of the District's 71,000 students score at the basic level or below.

Many principals say that the test helps motivate children and parents and identifies specific weaknesses in each child. Katherine James, the principal at Shepherd, said that she and her staff are going through the fall Stanford 9 scores for clues to help each student achieve. "We can do a lot with different learning styles," she said. "Not all children learn the same way."

Anne Gay, principal of Janney Elementary in Northwest Washington, said she and her teachers made certain that they were doing much more than simply preparing students for the Stanford 9. But the tests are important, she said, "as a way to tell where we are ahead and where we are behind with each child."

One high school principal, who declined to be identified because his view is not shared by his superiors, said teaching just for the purposes of passing the tests is still a danger. He noted that student achievement now accounts for 50 percent of a principal's annual evaluation, with 35 percent of that coming from standardized tests.

"Students have to deal with standardized tests. That's part of life," he said. "However, if the stakes put on it are too high, then it can detract from other kinds of progress that students can show in other areas. It shouldn't be the number one thing."

Some parents and teachers at high-achieving schools complain of the difficulties in meeting Ackerman's 10 percent improvement goal when they have so few students performing below basic. The fact that Ackerman is seeking a percentage rather than an absolute increase eases the problem somewhat. Shepherd, for example, had only about 20 students score below basic in reading last spring. The school can meet the target by moving just two of them into the basic category.

Lafayette Elementary School in Northwest Washington had the best Stanford 9 reading results in the city last spring and appeared to have only two students—0.5 percent of those tested—score below basic. The school will have to raise at least one of the students to basic to meet the goal, and that will be a 50-percent, not a 10-percent, improvement.

"I think it's idiotic," said Kate Hill, past president of the Parent Teacher Association at Lafayette. "Accountability is fine. You don't want to see those scores go down. But when you have people testing in the higher echelons, how much better than 100 percent can you get? It doesn't make sense."

School officials note that the program is designed to raise the scores of the large number of students at other schools who are below basic, and say that Lafayette is unlikely to suffer because of its high scores.

School officials recently admitted they misreported the number of children whose test scores were counted in the spring of 1997. The numbers for that year included children with limited English proficiency, while the 1998 numbers did not include those children.

Patricia A. Anderson, the District's interim director of educational accountability, said the report may have given the impression that many schools had a sharp drop in the number of test takers. This, in turn, made some test analysts suspect that low-scoring children had been kept from taking the test in 1998 so that the schools' scores would look better.

Actually, Anderson said, there was no significant difference in the numbers of children whose scores were counted from one year to the next. "We are doing everything we can to help schools do even better next year," she said.

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Incentivized School Standards Work

By Herbert J. Walberg

Most economists, psychologists, and lay people think humans respond to significant incentives. Parents, managers, and others responsible for improving performance routinely use incentives to encourage desirable behavior. The lure of the top ranks in competitive sports attracts immense energies of youths and adults, whether players or spectators. Standards with incentives also work in universities: Because they expect later compensation in money and prestige, ambitious college students strive for admission to the top professional schools of business, law, and medicine. Faculty raises in most (nonunionized) universities depend on teaching, research, and service.

In the ideal world of Jean Jacques Rousseau and many romantic educators, "intrinsic motivation" would reign. Instead of responding to incentives, we would accomplish things when the mood strikes. We would only do things worth doing as ends in themselves—not to attain further ends such as money, prestige, or altruistic contributions.

The real world, though, usually provides standards and incentives for doing well. Good music, mathematics, and team playing require long, disciplined practice. Steady pursuit, however, can lead not only to noble accomplishments but also to deep satisfactions and financial and other rewards. Top performance in many fields often appears to require a decade of 70-hour weeks.

Yet, schools—the very institutions that should academically prepare young people for doing well in adult life—make little use of effective incentives for accomplishments. School boards and administrators, for example, rarely measure and reward teachers' individual performance. Unions prevail in contracts that require paying public school teachers according to their degrees and years of experience, neither of which affects how much their students learn. After decades of declining union membership in other sectors, schools remain one of the few institutions that provide no merit incentives or even recognition for their workforce.

As they themselves agree, moreover, students also lack standards and incentives. A 1996 Public Agenda national survey of high school students showed that three-fourths believe stiffer examinations and graduation requirements would make students pay more attention to their studies. Three-fourths also said students who have not mastered English should not graduate, and a similar percentage said schools should promote only students who master the material. Almost two-thirds reported they could do much better in school if they tried. Nearly 80 percent said students would learn more if schools made sure they were on time and did their homework. More than 70 percent said schools should require after-school classes for those earning D's an F's.

In these respects, many teacher-educators differ sharply from students and the public. A 1997 Public Agenda survey of education professors showed that 64 percent think schools should avoid competition. More favored giving grades for team efforts than did those who favored grading individual accomplishments.

Teacher-educators also differ from other employers and other professions on measuring standards or even employing them at all. Employers use standardized multiple-choice examinations for hiring. So do selective colleges, graduate schools, and professional schools for admission decisions. Such examinations are required in law, medicine, and other fields for licensing because they are objective and reliable. But 78 percent of teacher-educators wanted less reliance on them.

> Though not all incentives are monetary, rational people require reasons to work hard.

Nearly two-thirds of teacher-educators admitted that education programs often fail to prepare candidates for teaching in the real world, and only 4 percent reported that their programs typically dismiss students found unsuitable for teaching. Thus, even starting with their undergraduate education, many prospective educators are laden with anti-competitive ideas against standards and incentives.

Seventy-nine percent of the teacher-educators agreed that "the general public has outmoded and mistaken beliefs about what good teaching means." They apparently forgot that citizens, who pay for schools, constitute their ultimate clients. Perhaps the public and students are right. It seems a good time to raise the question whether incentivized standards can work in schools as they do in much of the rest of society.

I recently carried out a follow-up study of what is to my knowledge the first clear-cut, large-scale trial of monetary incentives for public school students—the Advanced Placement Incentive Program, initiated by the O'Donnell Foundation of Dallas. The program made use of the Advanced Placement examinations, the only national tests that provide external, objective, and rigorous standards for high school students. Over half a million high school students take AP exams on the content of more than 25 college-level courses. Over 2,500 colleges grant course credit for passing grades, allowing students to graduate early or take more advanced college courses.

The foundation began the incentive program in response to widely voiced concerns about poor academic performance in Texas, a state becoming less dependent on agriculture and oil and competing with other states and nations in increasingly technical industries. Yet, of the typical 100 Texas students who entered kindergarten in 1981, only 72 graduated from high school in 1994. Only 36 of the original 100 entered higher education, and only 18 were expected to finish college in 1998. Test scores for students in the Dallas Independent School District, where the trial took place, were lower than elsewhere, and African-American and Hispanic students showed large disparities in academic performance.

Beginning with the 1990-91 school year, the incentive program paid students $100 for each passing score on the Advanced Placement examinations in English, calculus, statistics, computer science, biology, chemistry, and physics, plus a reimbursement for the cost of taking the exam. The program also provided a $2,500 stipend to each teacher undergoing training to teach ad-

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Education Week, November 4, 1998

vanced courses in those subjects. They also received $100 for each passing AP examination score of their students.

In the nine participating Dallas schools, sharply increasing numbers of boys and girls of all major ethnic groups took and passed the AP exams. The number rose more than 12-fold, from 41 the year before the program began to 521 when it ended in 1994-95. After terminating, the program continued to have carry-over effects: In the 1996-97 school year, two years after the program ended, 442 students passed, about 11 times more than the number in the year before the program began.

Though these numbers speak for themselves, interviews with students, teachers, and college admission officers revealed high regard for the incentive program. They felt that even students who failed AP exams learned better study habits and the importance of hard work to meet high standards.

In addition, the program had other benefits: Students could take more advanced courses in college. Those who passed a sufficient number of AP courses could graduate from college early, which saves their families tuition and taxpayers subsidies. Those who passed AP courses also had a better chance for merit scholarships and entry into selective colleges.

The AP incentive program shows that standards and incentives work in schools as they do in many other spheres of life. The lack of incentives in school seems an important reason why students find academics so boring and sports so exciting. Social promotion and graduating students for mere attendance is insufficient. Nor can paying teachers for their years of experience bring out their best. Though not all incentives are monetary, rational people require reasons to work hard

This experiment and common sense suggest that we try further incentives and evaluate the results. Several possibilities are intriguing. The O'Donnell Foundation, for example, demonstrated that incentives work for English, mathematics, statistics, and science courses. Would incentives work for AP exams in history, foreign languages, and other subjects?

Business and factory managers often complain about the poor quality of high school graduates but rarely review the high school records of prospective employees. Would paying starting-wage premiums for those with superior grades and test scores encourage better workforce preparedness?

Citizens and state legislators are disappointed with the poor results of expensive educational reforms. Would incentives work better? Would, for example, merit scholarships and reduced college tuition for students who pass rigorous examinations improve the quality and productivity of state education systems? Would state-funded incentives encourage students to take rigorous high school courses and graduate from college early, and thereby save tuition and tax funds?

Should school boards and administrators inform themselves of the achievement gains of each teacher's and each school's students in conducting performance reviews? Should students at poorly achieving schools be free to go elsewhere? Should state and local funds follow them to the public and private schools of their choice? Would such induced competition cause poorly achieving schools to improve or close?

Congress has spent more than $150 billion of citizens' monies on categorical education programs. Evaluations often show that students in these programs do no better and sometimes worse than comparable unserved students. Title I for poor children, for example, employs no incentives for educators or students to do well. Bilingual and special education programs employ perverse incentives, in essence paying districts to expand the numbers of students with poorly diagnosed English deficits and psychological pathologies while segregating them from others. What if good or improved performance was the standard for payment? ■

Press Association Limited, November 12, 1998

CASH FOR SCHOOLS 'COULD BE BASED ON RESULTS'

Tim Miles, Education Correspondent, PA News

Schools could be funded partly according to their results, for the first time since the 19th century, under radical proposals being considered by ministers. Those which hit exam targets, or other Government goals like reducing truancy and exclusions or boosting numbers staying on after the age of 16, would get extra cash, PA News understands. Heads would be expected to feed the cash as bonuses into a new "modernised" salary structure, to be outlined in a consultation document next month, which will reward good teachers with better pay. Schools which achieved good and consistently improving results would also benefit. It would be the first time since the Victorian era that schools in Britain had been funded - even in part - according to their success.

Before the General Election, the Tories drew back from proposals to fund school sixth forms according to results. Labour's move risks alienating teachers, as Education Secretary David Blunkett aims to win over the profession to performance-related pay. Schools' targets would reflect their circumstances, so that those succeeding against the odds would also have their achievement recognised. And financial backing for success would add a powerful incentive to education targets, which the Government has put at the centre of its policies.

But the biggest teaching union, the National Union of Teachers - which has already threatened industrial action to block payment by results - would remain adamantly opposed. No system of measuring achievement yet devised, it says, can strip out the educational advantages of children from better home backgrounds. And the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers has warned about the potential for "corruption", in giving heads and school governors power to share out extra cash among teachers.

Local authority leaders are also warning about the possible impact on failing schools. Graham Lane, education chairman of the Local Government Association, said: "You have to have a system that would reward good teachers in bad schools as well. "Otherwise, good teachers would leave those schools, and they would simply get worse."

It remains unclear how big a part schools' results will play in securing extra cash to reward their teachers, but it is unlikely to form the main element. A new, toughened system of appraisal is expected to form the basis of the new salary structure. Senior sources pointed to education systems in other countries which adopted both approaches, and combinations of the two.

Ultimately, Mr. Blunkett knows any new pay structure must be acceptable to teachers if it is to succeed in recruiting graduates into the profession. He has already ruled out "crude" payment by results. When the Green Paper is published next month, he will stress the importance of detailed consultation with teachers before a new pay structure is implemented in the year 2000. And he has already stressed that most teachers will benefit.

But the Treasury is pressing for the clearest possible link between teachers' pay and the external "product" of the state school system. It has agreed to a £19 billion boost to education funding over the next three years. Mr. Blunkett's task is to persuade teachers that they must deliver in return "something for something".

The National Association of Head Teachers - the first teaching union to accept the principle of performance-related pay as a "price worth paying" to boost teacher recruitment - has already proposed a model known to have impressed Government advisers. It has suggested a new main grade for teachers which would take a good honours graduate to £23,000-a-year after six years in the profession. Classroom teachers would then have the opportunity to earn another £8,000 without taking on extra responsibilities. But these annual increments would depend on certification by heads - backed by external verification - that teachers' performance was satisfactory.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers welcomed the idea of schools receiving extra cash in recognition of their success. General secretary Peter Smith said: "What's wrong with the country investing in success - given that we ensure that less successful schools are getting the money they need too." And head teachers' leaders also welcomed the plan. David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "Any proposal that delivers money directly into school budgets which supports Government plans for a new pay structure is not only to be welcomed but is an absolute prerequisite. "The Government must, however, take care not to attach to this funding anything which smacks of crude performance judgments."

A spokesman for the biggest teaching union, the National Union of Teachers, stressed it opposed any form of performance-related pay. "Teachers' pay should be fair and equitable. It should not be divisive and it should ensure that teachers doing the same job are paid the same," the spokesman said. "Measures of the quality of teachers cannot be based on pupils' results. Those results are influenced by factors external to a school and external to individual teachers."

A Teacher's View of Accountability

by Paul Zoch

It is an article of faith among reformers and critics of public education in the United States that the key to improving our schools is holding educators accountable for their students' success; their success will be gauged by standardized tests. When the students learn, according to the plan, the educators will be rewarded, and when students fail, the educators will lose their jobs, presumably to someone else who can get the job done.

That way of thinking, however well intentioned and logical it may seem, does not currently promise much hope for improving our substandard education system. It does not recognize that teachers are handcuffed, like "lion tamers without whips," because of the dominance of the progressive education ideology in our system. Either teachers need to be given the tools to make students take learning seriously, or the locus of accountability needs to shift entirely to the students. First I'll explain why students need to be made accountable first, and then I'll suggest some ways to empower teachers if the public demands to hold us accountable.

By focusing on teachers as the fount and source of students' success, it implies that the most important thing in the learning process is what teachers do, as if the students play a subordinate or even unimportant role in their learning. It wrongly assumes that teachers and administrators have an all-encompassing control over students' minds and thoughts, and thus relieves students of their responsibility for doing anything and everything they must in order to succeed. Thus it inadvertently hurts the very students that it seeks to help, for it tells them very clearly that the secret of their success is found outside of themselves, in someone else's actions (e.g., the teacher's), rather than in their own actions and behavior. Consequently, the students learn the invaluable lesson that someone else is responsible for their success or failure in life and, tragically enough, they never learn what they are truly capable of accomplishing through hard work. It also further alienates the already beleaguered teachers, by holding them responsible for things far beyond their control, namely students' minds and thoughts. Teachers then become cynical and burnt-out, because they are expected to do the impossible: making recalcitrant, lazy, apathetic students smart. Society suffers because it does not gain educated citizens willing to take responsibility for their lives and actions.

No Pain, No Gain

To see why the teacher accountability plan will not work as envisioned, let us first recognize that one learns through experience. What we know and feel is the result of our past experiences; when we learn, we always and inevitably relate new information to those past experiences in order to understand it. Learning can therefore be difficult and toilsome, as the learning process demands changes in the individual, and making those changes can be difficult. One must reconcile new information with the old, and doing so will demand changes in how we view reality, for the new information might, for example, invalidate knowledge that we previously valued, or it might clash with previous beliefs, or it might be so untenable in the old mental schema that only with the greatest exertion can we gain understanding. Nonetheless, learn we must, if we wish to improve and progress, and to learn, we must work through the sometimes discomforting changes.

The most important thing in the learning process is therefore the student or learner and his will to understand, *not* the teacher and his desire that the student learn, for the student is the only one with access to his memories and control over the detailed knowledge of how he views reality. The teacher does *not* know the myriad past experiences of each student, the teacher *cannot* know those past experiences and how they intertwine and interact to produce the student's personality and view of reality. The teacher has no power to customize the knowledge for each student; each student has the profound duty and responsibility to gain understanding, while the teacher can only help the student understand. Let's use a comparison from sports. I wish to learn how to shoot a free-throw in basketball. The coach can help by analyzing my actions, making suggestions for improvement, and cheering me on; still, I must learn to co-ordinate my muscles to apply the exact amount of force and trajectory to throw the ball into the basket. The coach cannot make my brain and muscles understand; I must go through the tedious experience to gain that understanding. Or an example from medicine is apt: I wish to lose weight and become healthy. My doctor can only urge me on and give advice; my body must experience the unsatisfied pangs of hunger, the dull pain of long unused muscles flexing and strengthening, and my body must sweat and hurt as I burn off fat. No pain, no gain, as the athletes say, a saying just as appropriate in educational matters, but regarded as reactionary ranting by Educationists. A student's learning of academic subjects is not much different. Learning demands changes in our view of reality and in our mental construct, and that change comes *only* through experience. Students gain that experience when they study, pay attention in class, subordinate emotions to intellectual development and, most of all, *strive* to understand.

Although Educationists know that one learns by doing, they and many members of the public are bound by education's Romantic and sentimental view of childhood, as well as by its customary anti-intellectualism. Schools, according to many Americans, should be places of joy, spontaneity, and vivacity, where children go to be delighted by learning. Learning should be fun, they say. Consequently we cannot expect students to toil and struggle at school; we must pity those poor children in Japan, Korea, and Germany who must study and toil and struggle to understand. If anyone must toil at school, let it be the *teachers*, who must provide learning games and fun activities that will enable children to learn effortlessly, automatically, and joyfully.

Searching for Excalibur

An absurd scenario exists in public schools across the US: students are sitting back in their desks, arms crossed, waiting for their teachers to *make them smart*. The students are seen as having no responsibility or role in whether or not they learn. If they do not wish to come to school, it becomes the teacher's responsibility to design lessons that make them want to come. If the students do not wish to pay attention in class, the teacher must design lessons that grab their attention. If the students do not behave during class, it is the teacher's fault, for *good* lessons prevent discipline problems. If the students have emotional problems, the teacher must design lessons with affective goals. If the students do not understand the subject, the teacher has failed to teach to their learning styles. Although the students have the most control over their thoughts and actions, they are not expected to do much in order to learn; the teachers must do what is necessary for the students to learn. Because the students' intellectual and emotional problems lie far outside of the teachers' area of control, they never get solved.

Since the teachers' methods and actions are thought to determine whether or not students learn, the colleges of education are engaged in the quest for the magical teaching methods that will enable students to learn easily, joyfully, and automatically. Finding that pedagogical Excalibur requires legions of researchers in Education, financed by generous tax dollars, to find how to accomplish the impossible, i.e., having students learn without experiencing any struggle. (The latest cure-all is computers and the Internet.) Thus when calling for accountability of teachers and administrators, *without* also expecting our students to study as diligently as their Asian counterparts do, the critics and reformers of U.S. public education inadvertently promote the growth and power of the Education monster.

Make Kids Accountable First

How can we improve our education system? We must first recognize the fact that learning requires a great deal of effort and personal responsibility on the part of the students, and then expect our young people to do what they must in order to learn. That is, after all, what succeeds in the schools of Japan:

> The Japanese believe that hard work, diligence, and perseverance yield success in education as well as in other aspects of life...The amount of time and effort spent in study are believed to be more important than intelligence in determining educational outcomes. Most Japanese parents and educators are unshakably optimistic that virtually all children have the potential to master the challenging academic curriculum, provided they work hard and long enough.[1]

In the U.S., people believe that students learn because of good teachers, and fail to learn because of bad teachers; we teachers are expected to work nothing short of miracles, and then are excoriated for our failure to accomplish the impossible.

The public may scream, "But we must hold teachers at least partly accountable for their students' performance. We must weed out those teachers doing harm to their students. We must find ways to reward teachers who *do* work magic." If the public must have its accountability, then at least give us teachers back our whips. Eliminate social promotion so that students know that there will be consequences for failure. End remediation in college, so that students know they can't coast by and still be assured a ticket to the local university. Allow teachers to use educational and disciplinary methods that work—even if they reduce the "joy" experienced by children. First and foremost, make students accountable for their own performance before passing the buck to their teachers.

We seem to think that education is so important we cannot expect the young to accomplish it. We want doctorates and professionals in charge, who will get the job done, so the young can enjoy their youth, free of demands and responsibilities; it appears that we do not want them to grow up. Yet we will make a great advance towards reform if we recognize that ultimately, the individual who most determines whether or not a 12 year old learns is only in the sixth grade. If we want our students to succeed in school and in life, we must expect them to learn to do what is necessary to succeed.

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[1] Robert Leastma, William J. Bennett, *et al.*, *Japanese Education Today* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, ED 275 620, 1987), p. 12.

St. Petersburg Times, November 6, 1998

Brogan will raise stakes for schools

The education commissioner will recognize improving schools and push for tougher requirements.

By STEPHEN HEGARTY

As Education Commissioner Frank Brogan prepares to serve out his final weeks as Florida's education chief, one of his most controversial initiatives -- the low-performing schools list -- comes full circle.

After three years of academic wake-up calls for schools, three years of help and humiliation, Brogan is expected to announce today that all 158 schools on the original 1995 list have shed the low-performing label by raising test scores. A handful of new schools have been added to the list.

Now Brogan is gearing up to raise the bar.

Later this month the state is expected to vote on new rules that raise expectations for schools, making it harder to avoid the low-performing label in the future. Those new standards would be phased in beginning next year when they will include the state's tough new test, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

In short, the state is about to become more demanding -- and that says nothing of the changes that governor-elect Jeb Bush might have in mind.

"It makes sense to raise the bar now," said Carolyn Herrington, director of Florida Education Policy Studies at Florida State University. "The bar initially was set low. I think it would be unfair to students to allow schools to get by at these levels."

The new, tougher rules are scheduled for a vote Nov. 24 by the Cabinet, meeting as the state Board of Education. At that same meeting, Cabinet members are expected to vote on tough achievement levels for FCAT.

The changes start with this year's test scores, and will be fully phased in the following year. (Scores are collected and reported the year after students take the tests, so the first report that will fully reflect the new rules will be out in 2000). By then, schools will have to deal with FCAT for math and reading scores and will have to score better on the state's writing test, Florida Writes.

Here's an example of how it would work. Under the current rule regarding writing scores, the state expects that 33 percent or more of the fourth-graders at an elementary school will score a 3 or above on Florida Writes. Under the new rules, the bar will be raised to 50 percent.

It's a bit of a leap, and the danger is that schools that just performed their way off the list might get caught back on the list with the new standards.

"It's tough when you just get there and the standards change on you," said Sylvia Hornsby, principal of Edison Elementary School in Tampa, which worked its way off the low-performing list this year. "We're looking to do better this year. We're always looking to do better."

Actually, Hornsby's school did so well on writing scores this past year (78 percent of her students scored above a 3), they would have no worries in that area.

In addition to raising the bar for the low-performing schools designation, the state also will consider categorizing all schools in five categories based on reading, writing and math scores. Rather than just focusing on low-performing schools in level one, the state will point out which schools fall into level 2, which is dangerously close to low-performing school status.

In taking a tip from Texas and other states, Florida also will analyze scores along racial and ethnic lines, and by economic status so it will be clear whether some subgroup in a school is lagging behind.

That way, even if a school's overall scores put it at performance level 5 (the highest level possible), it might not qualify as a level 5 if, for instance, test scores for Hispanic children at that school are lagging. Herrington said history suggests some schools will have difficulty -- at first.

"This whole process has been painful and demoralizing, at least initially, for some schools," Herrington said. "But it's effective. The evidence is pretty clear."

The evidence is the steady decline in the number of schools on the list. In 1995, the first year the list was introduced, 158 schools were labeled low-performers. The number dropped to 71 in 1996 and to 30 last year, as more and more schools scrambled to raise reading, writing and math scores.

The New York Times, November 14, 1998

List of Schools Failing in City Grows Larger

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

State education officials yesterday added 21 New York City schools to the state's list of failing schools, bringing the total number in the city to 97, 3 more than last year.

While aides to Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew focused on the fact that 18 schools had improved enough to be removed from the list, some education officials expressed concern that the city was not showing progress in reducing the number of low-performing schools.

One out of 9 of the city's 1,100 public schools is now officially designated as failing, more than at any time in the last decade. All but four of the schools on the state list are in New York City.

The State Education Commissioner, Richard P. Mills, and aides to Dr. Crew played down the increase in the number of failing schools, saying that on average, the test scores in those schools had risen over the last decade, and that the standard for a failing school was higher today.

In the last two years, however, the standard has not changed. Last year, 20 schools were placed on the list and 18 were taken off, including 3 that were closed down.

Irving Hamer Jr., the new member of the Board of Education from Manhattan, said yesterday that while he was encouraged that some schools had improved enough to get off the list, he was disturbed by the lack of steady progress.

But Mr. Mills stressed that 18 schools had come off the list in each of the last two years, compared with 10 in 1996 and 11 in 1995, the year he and Dr. Crew were appointed. "What we have now is not a static system at all," he said. "I look at this as evidence of real focus on the part of the city, and it's paying off."

Dr. Crew was in Connecticut on personal business yesterday and could not be reached, a spokeswoman said.

But Judith A. Rizzo, his deputy chancellor for instruction, said that Dr. Crew would not hesitate to remove principals and superintendents to improve failing schools.

Dr. Rizzo said that schools under the Chancellor's direct control had improved, proving that it could be done. Of the 18 schools that improved enough to be taken off the list, 5 are in the so-called Chancellor's district. Dr. Crew created that district shortly after he took over the school system in 1995, and since then, he has put 12 of the city's worst schools in it.

Mr. Mills agreed that the success of those schools was particularly impressive, since they had been the worst on the list and had been on it the longest.

But the increase in the number of failing schools comes even as Mr. Mills and the State Board of Regents have sharply raised the standards that children at all levels of the system will be required to meet. In January, the state will introduce new, tougher reading tests for fourth and eighth grades.

It is also phasing in a requirement that all high school students pass Regents examinations to graduate, and eliminating the much easier Regents Competency Tests. In the past, most high school students in New York City have taken the competency exams.

Raymond J. Domanico, executive director of the Public Education Association, a nonprofit group that monitors the schools, said a static or growing list of failing schools was incompatible with higher standards.

"Those kids are in real trouble," he said. "If there are 97 schools enrolling well over 60,000 kids on that list, I don't think that's good news."

Assemblyman Steven Sanders, chairman of the Assembly Education Committee, called the new list "a mixed bag."

"Altogether," he said, "we are seeing a net gain of three schools, and that's heading in the wrong direction."

When the Legislature reconvenes in January, he said, he will propose an increase in funds to failing schools — to $22 million from the current $2 million — and a law that gives children at those schools the right to transfer to any school of their choice.

Whether a school is placed on state's list of "schools under registration review" depends mainly on scores on reading and math tests, and the standard has often been misunderstood by parents and even by teachers.

The Board of Education, in its press release yesterday, said that an elementary school was placed on the list if fewer than 40 percent of its third-grade students were reading at or above grade level. In fact, the cutoff is not grade level but "remedial level," equivalent to a late-second-grade reading level.

The Daily Telegraph, October 16, 1998

Failing School To Be Put Into Private Sector

By John Clare

A SURREY comprehensive blighted by poor teaching and badly behaved children is to be handed over to the private sector, the Conservative-controlled county council announced yesterday.

Dr. Andrew Povey, chairman of the education committee, said "something new" was needed to tackle the intractable problems at Kings' Manor, a "sink" school in Guildford.

"By taking this bold step to involve education experts from the private sector in running a state school, the committee is signalling a fresh start for Kings' Manor," he said. "We want to involve a company with new ideas, access to capital and the freedom to create a new school which can be marketed more effectively."

The decision was condemned by the Local Government Association and the leaders of the two biggest teaching unions.

"Stockbroker Surrey is saying that it cannot or will not find the money to meet the needs of the pupils," said Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers.

"That is an extraordinary admission which has serious implications for the future of state education."

Doug McAvoy, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, called on David Blunkett, the Education and Employment Secretary, to reaffirm his commitment that state schools would not be run for private profit.

Graham Lane, the local education authorities' spokesman, said there was no reason for Surrey to "depart the battlefield" because councils had ample experience of turning round failing schools.

Kings' Manor was condemned by Ofsted three months ago for failing to give its 400 pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The inspectors said more than 40 per cent of the teaching was less than satisfactory. Most lessons lacked focus and rigour. The pupils responded with "uncouth behaviour, inattention, restlessness and disaffection".

Situated in an area of "some social deprivation", the school provided poor value for money and its leadership and management needed to be improved.

Dr. Paul Gray, Surrey's director of education, said the number of pupils had fallen by more than half because parents preferred to send their children to one of four neighbouring schools, all of which were exceptionally successful.

Having spare places, Kings' Manor was forced to accept large numbers of children, including some with emotional and behavioural problems, whom other schools had turned away or expelled. "We think the best way forward is to create a school with a distinctive identity and a particular specialism, perhaps in technology," Dr. Gray said.

Among the organisations expected to submit bids are the Edison Project, an American company that specialises in rescuing failing schools and making a profit out of them.

Its technique is to sack incompetent staff, lengthen the teaching day and insist on full parental involvement, backed up by installing a free computer in every home.

The British front-runners are CfBT Education Services, which is already helping to run state schools in the education action zone in Lambeth, south London, and Nord Anglia, which successfully operates independent schools here and abroad.

Kings' Manor will open under new management in September 2000.

The number of pupils leaving school without any GCSEs has fallen by 7,000, according to official statistics published yesterday.

The figures showed that 93.4 per cent of pupils who took GCSEs achieved at least one pass.

The Tail That Wags the Standards Dog

Jerry Jesness

Texas leaders would have us believe that the quality of education in our state has improved dramatically. They offer as proof the steady, dramatic climb in scores of the state mandated Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and Texas's fourth-graders' strong showing on the last NAEP mathematics test.

Unfortunately, not all measures are so favorable. Texas's ACT and SAT scores remain stagnant. Our SAT verbal scores are exactly the same as they were ten years ago: still very near the bottom nationally. Although Texas SAT math scores have risen slightly in that time, they are still in the bottom quintile. There are other negative indicators as well. More than sixty percent of Texas algebra students failed their end-of-course exams last spring. In some Texas colleges, more entering freshmen than not are placed in remedial classes, and special education diagnosticians continue to discover that some students who have passed their graduation TAAS are testing years below grade level on other tests.

A phenomenal number of Texas schools have ascended to recognized or exemplary status based principally on TAAS scores. In fact, the ranks of the recognized now include some campuses that once had TAAS passing rates in the low teens. This growth is rarely reflected in other measures. My district is typical of these miracle districts. Our TAAS scores have risen steadily. In 1997 we were recognized by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) because over eighty-nine percent of our TAAS-eligible students passed their tests. We have since been elevated to exemplary status. Our SAT and ACT scores, however, are dismal. Our seniors have never approached the national average on either of these tests.

According to the TEA web site, in 1997 our average SAT score was 891 and our average ACT score was 18.8. Only five of our 305 graduates, less than two percent, scored at or above the TEA-set criterion, 1110 on SAT or 24 on ACT.

How did we manage to become the best according to one measure and almost the worst according to another? It's a matter of focus.

There are three ways to improve test scores. One is to improve education. This is, of course, what schools are supposed to do; however, many improve scores by adjusting curricula so that mostly tested material is taught and by familiarizing students with the test format.

The quality of instruction in my district, and probably in most Texas districts, has improved for two groups of students: the very young and the very low performing. I feel pride in my school when I see what is being done in first- and second-grade classrooms. Children in small classes learn to read with phonics. Expectations are higher than they were in years past, and few of our children now reach third grade (the first year that the TAAS is given) without having attained a reasonable level of literacy. Those that have fallen behind receive much-needed extra help. Certainly the TAAS has much to do with this success.

Slow learners are no longer ignored. Whereas schools in the pre-TAAS era tended to match their best teachers with the highest performing children, many schools now try to match their top faculty with poor performers, especially with the "bubble" children, those who have almost, but not quite, been able to pass their tests. When I began teaching in Texas in 1983, in the pre-TAAS days, too many schools were writing such children off as unteachable and merely keeping them warehoused and busy. That year, my neighbor to the right taught English literature by showing films at least three days per week, while the one to my left had students draw scenes from great works rather than actually read them. My principal that year explained to me that I should grade my low group students by giving credit for each question answered or blank filled in, even if the answers were wrong. Since we have ability grouping, he reasoned, there was no reason to give failing grades. If students or their parents wanted more, they could always petition for a change of placement.

Mercifully the TAAS graduation requirement and state monitoring of TAAS scores have put an end to such practices. Since the TEA separately monitors passing rates for different ethnic and economic groups, no Texas school dares ignore any segment of its population. Texas schools now offer at least literacy and consumer level math skills to all their students.

Unfortunately, the TAAS has created a ceiling as well as a floor. The TAAS is only a basic-skills test and certainly was never intended to become the engine that drives the curricula of many, if not most, Texas schools. However, that is exactly what has happened.

Teaching to the Test

The TAAS tests reading and mathematics from third to eighth grades and again in tenth. Writing is tested in fourth, eighth, and tenth grades. Social studies and science are tested in eighth grade only. There are end-of-course tests given for high school biology, algebra, U.S. history, and English II. Students only need to pass the math, reading, and writing TAAS tests in order to graduate, and only those tests are

considered in ranking schools. As a result, those subjects, or rather the TAAS-tested elements of those subjects, have become the top priorities of Texas schools.

The recently revised Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), the learning standards established at the state level for all Texas public school students, describe a more demanding course of study than that most Texas students actually receive. Fourth graders, for example, are supposedly expected be able to do the following:

- Explain causes and effects of European exploration and colonization of Texas and the Western Hemisphere.
- Describe political, social, and economic changes in Texas during the second half of the 19th Century.
- Describe political, economic, and physical regions in Texas and the Western Hemisphere.
- Describe the characteristics and benefits of the free enterprise system in Texas.
- Explain the basic functions of the three branches of state government.

If they were followed, these social studies TEKS would represent a solid curricular guide; however, neither social studies nor science is tested in elementary school, so those subjects are not taken very seriously. Many of our students do not know that Texas is a state, that there was a Civil War in the second half of the 19th Century, that we live in the Western Hemisphere, that we have a free enterprise system, or that our state government has three branches. There is a similar mismatch between the science TEKS and our students' knowledge. In our "exemplary" school, social studies and science are each allocated only twenty-three minutes per day, barely enough time to mention, let alone teach, the content suggested by the TEKS. The rest of the academic day is allocated to the "important" subjects, those that are to be tested.

Much of that time is spent familiarizing students with the TAAS format and teaching test-taking gimmicks. Our fourth graders have two seventy-minute reading sessions daily. In one session, which also includes spelling, the children read short selections from books, but in the other they read sample TAAS passages. Either they work on passages from released tests from past years or in booklets with names like TAAS Master, TAAS Coach, and TAAS Tutor. Students are allotted the entire period to read a one- or two-page passage and answer the five to eight questions that follow. They are encouraged to read the passage, highlight key words, write a brief summary of each paragraph, read the answer choices and eliminate unreasonable ones, reread answers, check for words in the answer choices that match words in the passages, answer, reread, and recheck. Of course, children who learn to read in this excruciatingly slow manner are unlikely to become avid readers, but, then again, that's not the point of the class.

Math instruction is also divided between real instruction and test-busting gimmicks. Much time in math class is spent working in TAAS format. When doing the sample TAAS tests, students learn special key words. "Total" and "altogether" usually mean add, but occasionally mean multiply; "more", "less", "difference", or any word with the "er" suffix mean subtract. Words like "per", "each", and "apiece" indicate multiplication if they are found before the question, but indicate division if found within the question. Next, students plug answer choices into the problems and check them for reasonableness. After highlighting relevant numbers and key words and crossing out unreasonable answer choices, students are asked to draw a picture that represents the problem. Then they set up the problem and compute. If they do not know their math facts, they are expected to count on their fingers or draw and count sticks. Since they will have up to six hours to answer about fifty questions, they will have ample time. As a consultant once told me, "The TAAS doesn't care how they get the answer."

A Chance to Start Anew

The TAAS tests will be rewritten next year, supposedly to reflect the TEKS, but few of us Texas educators expect them to become substantially more difficult. The social studies and science TEKS look good on paper, but these subjects are only tested at the eighth grade level. Past science and social studies TAAS tests involved mostly reading and interpreting of short passages, charts, and graphs. Little of the knowledge of science and social studies described in the essential elements (the forerunners of the TEKS) was tested. The math TEKS state that students will know and apply math facts; however, as long as the test is not timed, children who have not mastered these facts can still draw and count their way to passing scores. The reading TEKS states that students will read a variety of grade-level texts. Since no specific works of literature are specified, however, there is no way to test whether this has been done. We expect more short passages followed by multiple-choice questions.

The TAAS has become the principal driving force in Texas education. A few minor changes would make it a much better instrument. By timing the test, we would eliminate the practice of teaching even older children to do math by drawing and counting. By mandating that students read a certain number of works of literature in reading and English classes and requiring schools to submit to parents a list of works to be read, we could eliminate the practice of making reading classes into TAAS practice sessions. By advertising that the TAAS tests only basic, not academic skills, we could reduce the temptation to gear all instruction to it. Let us keep the floor in place but smash the ceiling.

Jerry Jesness is a special education teacher in an elementary school in Texas.

Education Week, December 16, 1998

Commissioner Calls for Expanding Texas Assessments

By Robert C. Johnston

Texas students, already among the most tested in the country, would take more exams in more subjects under a new proposal by state Commissioner of Education Mike Moses.

But while his blueprint for expanding the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills has been well-received, teacher groups have blasted a companion plan to tie teacher bonuses to scores on the statewide tests.

If approved by the legislature next year, Mr. Moses' plan, among other things, would move the high school exit exam from 10th to 11th grade. It would also add 9th grade tests in mathematics and reading to the TAAS exams now given in grades 3-8 and 10.

"These proposed changes, which we have been preparing for months, are numerous and substantial," Mr. Moses said at a Dec. 4 news briefing. "But I believe they will help us meet the challenges we face today."

Teachers' groups, however, say what should be one of the state's biggest challenges—raising teacher salaries by $6,000 to reach the national average of $38,436—is not addressed by the bonus proposal.

"The real need is to jack up the overall compensation for all teachers so that we get the best teachers in the classrooms," said John Cole, the president of the Texas Federation of Teachers, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers. "We need to stop looking at quick-fix gimmicks."

Mr. Moses' proposal would represent the first major change in the state's testing system since 1994, the first year TAAS exams were given. It comes on the heels of a privately funded report that said the TAAS tests are too easy. (*See Education Week, Nov. 18, 1998.*)

While scores have steadily improved, many Texans say it's time to toughen the exams, which were given to almost 1.9 million students last school year. That number would rise to 2.5 million with the new 9th and 11th grade tests.

'Positive Move'

Moving the exit exam up a grade, the state schools chief says, would measure more of what students are supposed to learn in high school. The new exam would also add science and social studies to the current exit exam topics of reading, writing, and math.

Mr. Moses' proposal comes even as the 10th grade exit exam faces a court challenge filed in 1997 by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund. The lawsuit against the state department of education charges that the exam discriminates against minority students, who have failed it at higher rates than whites.

But Mr. Moses said the state "cannot allow a lawsuit to hinder or stymie our efforts to improve student performance and increase accountability in the state."

Other proposed changes include:

- Adding science and math to the 10th grade test, adding science to 5th and 7th grade tests, and adding social studies to the 4th grade test;
- Creating a way to gauge the reading abilities of Spanish-speaking students in grades K-2;
- Expanding the current Spanish version of TAAS in grades 3-6 to cover the same areas tested on the English version.

For the first time, districts that want to win the state's highest ratings would be required to have a 50 percent passing rate on state end-of-level exams in Algebra I, biology, U.S. history, and English II.

The idea was applauded by critics of the current accountability system who argue that TAAS exams, which are separate from end-of-level tests, have become too easy.

"Putting end-of-level exams in the accountability system is the only way you should be able to get exemplary or recognized. It's a very positive move," said George H. Scott, the president of the Tax Research Association of Houston and Harris County, a business-funded, watchdog group in Houston that released a study last month faulting the TAAS tests for not being difficult enough.

Bonuses Snubbed

In contrast to the positive responses to the test plan, which included praise by newly re-elected Republican Gov. George W. Push, the teacher-bonus proposal drew sharp rebukes.

Mr. Moses wants to give yearly individual cash awards to the teachers at the schools that show the most significant improvements in test scores, attendance, and dropout rates. He estimated that would result in awards for 25 percent of the state's teachers.

"What does that do for schools already at the 90 percent level and which work all year to stay there?" asked Sue Barker, the president of the Texas Classroom Teachers Association. "We need across-the-board raises."

Mr. Cole, the president of the state's AFT affiliate, said pay raises, not bonuses, would benefit students most by attracting qualified teachers. "Teachers are being told to teach a subject they did not want to teach and are not qualified to teach, and now we say we're going to tie your salary to that," he added. "They get resentful."

And 1999 may be the year to lobby for a big raise because the legislature will begin its session with a $6 billion budget surplus.

Mr. Cole's organization is pushing for a $6,000 annual salary increase for all the state's roughly 264,000 teachers, at a cost of about $1.6 billion a year.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Teacher Quality

According to a recent survey by Recruiting New Teachers, nine out of ten Americans believe that the presence of a qualified teacher in the classroom is the most significant factor contributing to higher pupil achievement. Research confirms this conventional wisdom. But how to ensure teacher quality?

Randal C. Archibold explores the issue in, "Getting Tough on Teachers" from the *New York Times*. The article reveals that raising standards for teacher education programs is met with great resistance, largely because these programs already find it difficult to attract high achievers. There is also concern that raising the bar will exacerbate impending teacher shortages. (Maybe if we were less obsessed with slashing class size, we might be able to fully staff schools *and* raise standards.)

Next, Richard Ingersoll poses the question, "Why So Many Underqualified High School Teachers?" in his *Education Week* commentary. Ingersoll was alarmed to discover that a great percentage of U.S. secondary school teachers are teaching "out of field." (For instance, 53% of history teachers did not major or minor in history.) Ingersoll argues that principals are largely to blame, since they often make subject assignments based on convenience rather than the teacher's academic background.

John R. Silber, chancellor of Boston University and chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Education, is well known for his impatience with teacher training institutions. Maybe he's trying to make nice with his *Wall Street Journal* article, "Good Teachers Deserve a Tax Break." His premise: reward excellence.

While Silber offers a carrot, Arlene Ackerman, Superintendent of the D.C. Public Schools, wields a stick. As described by Valerie Strauss and Jay Mathews in their *Washington Post* article, "Poorly Performing Teachers to Face Penalties," Ackerman has authorized principals to fire incompetent teachers who don't show signs of improvement. Teachers will have three months to shape up or ship out.

Local teachers' unions are jumping on the reform bandwagon too, as evidenced by Beth Daley's *Boston Globe* article, "Teachers Union to Urge New Training." The Massachusetts Federation of Teachers has called for the elimination of undergraduate education degrees in favor of subject area majors and a one-year masters program. We applaud the focus on content knowledge, though we are not persuaded that the "five-year" approach is wise. Do we really want another obstruction placed in front of potential teachers?

As our next article shows, roadblocks created by certification requirements already deter many enthusiastic potential teachers. "The Hurdles You Have to Jump," a *Washington Post* essay by Elizabeth Greenspan, is a fresh perspective on the difficulties and frustrations faced by soon-to-be college graduates who want to go into teaching but have not followed the traditional certification route.

Finally, William Raspberry uses his syndicated column to describe the "Soldiers to Scholars" program that brings former service members into the classroom.

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The New York Times, November 1, 1998

Getting Tough on Teachers

FACULTY MEMBERS AT MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, huddled one morning this semester in the education department's Africana Resource Center, a small conference room lined with stacks of multicultural books.

The occasion was one of the college's "teaching circles," meetings among faculty members from various departments — on this day, chemistry, English and math — aimed at finding ways to strengthen programs in the face of a looming crisis: Medgar Evers's teacher-education program, like many other colleges' throughout the state, faces decertification unless it improves.

The dominant topic at the meeting was literacy. Everyone talked about getting students to "write across the curriculum," a buzz phrase here and elsewhere that means giving students more reading and writing assignments in all classes, even science and math.

Then the discussion turned, as it often does, to the future and to the hurdles the school must overcome to prepare tomorrow's teachers.

"Many students do not know how to do the simplest algebra, and that's true of science majors, too," said John Flowers, a professor of physical science and computer science.

"So many of my students come to us without having read a whole book," said Zala Chandler, an English literature professor.

"They are afraid of math; they are afraid of arithmetic; I'm not saying anything about geometry," said Tatyana Flesher, a math professor. "If they carry this attitude to the classroom, you will maybe have kids who don't know geometry."

Sharon Simmons, the chairman of the education department, is familiar with such laments, given the fact that many of the students throughout the college come from some of New York City's most academically inferior schools in some of its poorest neighborhoods.

But despite the City University of New York's fabled and fading open-admissions policy, the education program is taking a tack being repeated on teacher-education campuses across the country: it is raising its admissions and curriculum standards — even at the cost of turning away students, something the program has rarely done.

"We are interested in quality at this point," Dr. Simmons said.

And for good reason. Like three other CUNY campuses — York, Lehman and City College — Medgar Evers is positioned to lose its right to train teachers if it does not meet new state standards. Among the new benchmarks it must reach is insuring that 80 percent or more of its graduates pass the state's licensing examinations, beginning in 1999; the schools get three years to shape up. But last year, just 41 percent at Medgar Evers passed the liberal arts exam — the worst performance in the state after City College, at 40 percent, and Boricua College in Manhattan, at 28 percent.

The anxiety at New York's teacher colleges is not unique, nor is the soul-searching about the teachers they are sending out and the students they are letting in. Schools across the nation are taking a hard look at their curriculums, with many shifting emphasis from a theoretical approach to practical experience, and state after state is introducing or toughening licensing examinations and mandating higher standards in what amounts to an all-out assault on education programs and budding teachers.

- This summer Pennsylvania enacted reforms that include requiring prospective teachers to maintain a B average in liberal arts courses before they can be admitted to a training program and a B in the subject they wish to teach. (Some colleges had been admitting students with a C-minus average.)
- Last spring Massachusetts introduced its first-ever certification exam; nearly 60 percent flunked, and educators and politicians have been fighting about the test and how to improve teacher education ever since.
- This fall a Texas law went into effect requiring 70 percent of an institution's graduates — and 70 percent of each racial and ethnic group — to pass the state's certification exam or face probation. Of the state's 86 teacher colleges, 35 did not measure up, threatening their accreditation if they do not improve their rates within three years.
- If the 80 percent requirement for New York's 113 teacher-education programs were in effect today, at least two dozen colleges would lose accreditation, including four campuses of CUNY, the main supplier of teachers for New York City public schools

Raising standards is a trend that will surely intensify another expected crisis: a growing shortage of teachers. Nationwide, some 200,000 new teachers will be needed within the next 10 years. In New York City alone, officials estimate that they will need to hire 30,000 within the next five years to fill gaps created by growing enrollments, retirements and people leaving the profession.

"If you raise the bar, fewer people will get over it," said David Imig, the executive director of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, based in Washington. "The reality comes every Tuesday after Labor Day, when you've got vacancies in classrooms that have to be staffed."

The debate on how to turn out quality teachers has long bedeviled educators. It arises periodically, usually after the nation goes into spasms over the quality of education as a whole.

It happened after the Civil War, with the rise of industrialization and the shift in skills needed as American workers migrated from the farm to the factory.

It happened after Sputnik, when the Soviet Union's launch of the first satellite was taken as a sign of the poor quality of American math and science education.

And it is happening anew, with test results showing that American students are behind their peers in other industrialized nations on math and science, and lagging in literacy.

The latest bout of concern is traced to the 1983 report "A Nation at Risk," produced by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which called poor teachers a significant obstacle to the preparation of elementary and secondary school students.

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Until the report, policy makers and educators had paid attention primarily to what children were doing in the classroom, not who was telling them how to do it. Teachers are now increasingly seen as the missing component in the drive to raise academic standards in elementary and secondary schools.

"There is a growing body of empirical evidence of how important teaching is, as opposed to everything else," said Charles Lenth, the director of higher education for the Education Commission of the States, a Denver-based nonprofit organization that studies state education issues. "You can raise standards, but if you don't have good teachers, you won't make progress."

THE PROSPECT OF FAILING NEW YORK'S three-part, eight-hour certification exams caused Sharon Johnson, a Medgar Evers student who hopes to teach special education, to stay up all night crying on the eve of the tests last semester.

Among students, there is a renewed respect for the exams, which measure knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences, the subject to be taught and teaching skills. Many have tried to take the tests cold, without studying guides or sample questions, or taking preparation courses offered on campus.

"There is a technique to taking this test," said Ms. Johnson, who passed and is scheduled to graduate in January. "If you are used to book learning, you are not going to pass this test. You need a strategy like a person preparing for medical-board tests."

Deborah Hoyle, 38, chose Medgar Evers after a year at City College, where she felt lost among the school's 2,500 education students. Like many of her fellow students, she is a mother — she has two daughters, 18 and 9 — and has worked as a teacher's aide. Once so shy that she quit a speech class because it required an oral presentation to her classmates, Ms. Hoyle now laughs at the episode and chats freely, a change she credits partly to a close-knit, nurturing atmosphere at school.

After graduating in June, she wants to work as an elementary school teacher. But she, too, felt that her dream was being frayed by the certification exams. She failed to prepare the first time she took them in February, figuring her class work would stand her in good stead. She failed the liberal arts and science test by three points, crushing her spirit. "I was sick," she said. "I could not believe I failed the exam.

"But it did show me my weakness," she added. "At Medgar Evers we are taught to write essays a certain way, with an introduction, a thesis and three supporting details, but that's not what they wanted. It was more like summarize what you read and then give your opinion." Ms. Hoyle passed the exam on her second try.

As elsewhere, students at Medgar Evers did far better on the portion that was focused on teaching method and subject area than on the part designed to measure knowledge of the liberal arts. And some CUNY institutions did relatively well on all the exams, including the liberal arts and sciences exam. For instance, at Queens College, whose students are drawn heavily from Queens and suburban Long Island, 88 percent passed.

There is no easy measure of whether teachers are actually less able, since many exams are new or have been radically changed. That the tests don't judge teaching ability so much as general knowledge was a criticism heard after recent poor showings at some schools in New York and Massachusetts.

"I can understand the public's need to sort of have a sense that teachers are qualified and knowledgeable in their fields," said Joseph Caruso, the chairman of the education department at Framingham State College in Massachusetts. "But as a society we place too much emphasis on tests."

For all the sweat over the exam, Ms. Hoyle does not regret her decision to enter teaching or Medgar Evers, founded in 1969 in the ferment of the civil rights movement and named after the slain Mississippi civil rights leader. The college has long been proud of its service to the African-American community, including sponsoring an annual conference of black writers.

"It doesn't make sense to me to teach in Canarsie or Howard Beach and then come home and look at the kids in my community, where I live, who need me," she said. "I want to graduate from Medgar Evers and say I went to a predominantly black college, and I want to work in my community."

Some administrators doubt that the state would ever really close education programs, and indeed the state is considering changing the way it calculates which test-takers would count toward the 80 percent cutoff, which could inflate pass rates. Nonetheless, all the threatened colleges are seeking to raise admissions standards, and suffering the consequences — a drop-off in the number of eligible students.

This year, for instance, entering Medgar Evers students needed a minimum 2.5 overall grade point average — and a 3.0 in English classes — out of 4.0; previously, students with overall averages as low as 2.3 could get in. And in a departure from previous years, all students were required to pass CUNY's basic skills test before they were accepted.

Officials have discussed raising the required G.P.A. to 2.7 but are reluctant, for fear of turning away even more students and departing from the college's open-door spirit. Although the college has not taken its census yet, Dr. Simmons says she is certain fewer students are entering the program, which had about 900 students last spring. Some courses had to be canceled this year because too few signed up.

Mwalimu J. Shujaa, dean of the school of liberal arts and education, says losing the teaching program would set back efforts to diversify the teaching work force, which is overwhelmingly white in New York (66 percent) and the nation (87 percent). Educators believe that a diverse teaching force would better respond to the increasingly diverse student population.

"I'm sure you are aware of the national profile of teachers," Dr. Shujaa said. "White, female, suburban."

"IF YOU NEED A LOT OF TEACHERS BUT DON'T want to pay much, what do you do?" said Richard Soder, a professor of education at the University of Washington in Seattle, who has studied teacher-training and hiring. "You go to women and make sure the training is not significant, because they might find grounding for areas where they make more money."

Indeed, the public school teaching work force of 2.7 million nationwide is more than three-quarters female. And although some states are seeking to raise teacher pay, the average beginning salary remains well below that for fields like business and computers.

It has always been a struggle to attract top-flight teaching candidates. Even within universities, support and respect for education programs go lacking.

According to a 1997 National Center for Education Statistics report, based on 1992-93 data, students in education programs tested into remedial college courses at higher rates — 18 percent took remedial math, compared with 11 percent of majors in the humanities and social science, and 13 percent took remedial English, compared with 7 percent of humanities and social science majors. Education students' entrance exam scores are also lower, with about half as many education majors in the top quartile as humanities and social science majors.

John Silber, the chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Education, put it rather tartly during a summer meeting of education school deans smarting over the poor performance of students on that state's teacher certification exams. "Education programs have a reputation as a place for dum-dums," he said, and are considered "the laughing stock by serious scholars."

He added, "We ought to take that to heart."

An additional problem is that universities do not tend to pour money into their educational programs, which are relatively inexpensive to run, requiring little in the way of equipment and other resources in comparison with, say, chemistry.

"These places are cash cows," said Linda Darling-Hammond, director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, based at Teachers College at Columbia University.

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that education professors are paid, on average, $11,000 less a year than their peers in other departments. And colleges spend about $100 less per student credit-hour on education programs than for engineering, though tuition is generally the same.

Unlike medical or law schools, education programs are also not required to be certified or accredited by a professional board, although there is a move to change that. Of the 1,300 teacher-education institutions, about 500 have been accredited voluntarily by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, a Washington-based professional organization that conducts rigorous review of their faculties, curriculums and student populations.

Two states, North Carolina and Arkansas, require the council's accreditation, and several others, including New York, now strongly advise it, said Arthur Wise, the group's president. Only four institutions in New York State — Fordham, Hofstra, and Niagara universities and the State University College at Buffalo — are accredited by the council.

FOR YEARS, THE MAJOR CROP TO SPROUT from the baked earth of far west Texas has been cotton, grown on great big farms that splash green and white on the otherwise brown and crimson moonscape.

Now the folks "up at the college" — the University of Texas at El Paso — are trying to seed something else entirely, all in the name of better educating the farmers and working-class residents along the Mexican border.

The university, recognized by the United States Department of Education in its "Promising Practices" report on teacher education in September, is growing a teaching hospital, but one that aims to turn out teachers rather than doctors. And, to carry the analogy further, the E.R.'s where the interns apply theory to practice are schools like H.D. Hilley Elementary, right in the middle of a cotton field in nearby Socorro.

There, Maribel Alarcon, a student teacher, huddled on a recent day with a pack of sixth graders who measured and snipped and folded their multicolored construction paper into origami, all in the name of geometry.

"Do you see the triangles?" she asked as they twisted and turned their frogs and whales to find the shapes. "Is there a parallelogram in there?"

Taking a breather, Ms. Alarcon summed up the value of the classroom experience: "On campus we got a lot of theory, but here we have hands-on practice with the kids. This gives us real approaches."

It is such approaches that educators hail as the wave of the future for education schools, which have been looking inward to find ways to improve the way they themselves teach.

Education students, like those with other majors, usually spend the first couple of years taking a college's core requirement of arts and sciences courses, like English and math, with the last two years devoted to education classes. In this latter period, they have traditionally done an 8-to-12-week "student teaching" experience at a school, and also taken courses that focus on theory, methods of instruction and, in many cases, multiculturalism.

Most campuses devote considerable class time to teaching student-centered learning, a method of instruction that discourages teachers from standing in front of the classroom to lecture; instead, they are taught to engage youngsters in group discussions and activities that encourage the children to ask questions and find their own answers, with guidance rather than instruction from the teachers.

"Don't be a sage on the stage, be a guide on the side," is how Stephanie Hadley, an El Paso student, put it.

"The old way was teacher-directed, where they don't ask kids to do anything," said Carmen Rotchford, another student, as if recalling a bad memory. "But they just lecture and stand up there in the front of the class."

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Or, as their science-education teacher, Sally Blake, explained: "Do you want kids that can do rote memorization, or do you want ones that can think? You want ones that can think."

In her class, it is not unusual to see students doing the very activities they would require of their pupils. One day last month, for instance, her students found themselves doing a minute's worth of jumping jacks, but not to limber up. They broke up into groups of three: one student did the jacks; another counted them; and a third recorded the time at intervals throughout the minute. The goal was to measure the changing rate over time, and prepare a bar graph showing the results. In most cases, the pace of the jacks slowed over the course of the minute. "It's something physical, as opposed to word problems," Professor Blake said.

Other education courses typically involve classroom management and diversity.

Downstairs from Professor Blake's class, Virginia Gonzalez teaches "Critical Pedagogy," whose reading list includes titles like "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," by Paulo Freire. In this class, she said, they learn to respect students' viewpoints and to become mindful of the displays of cultural diversity seen in a classroom, like Hispanic immigrants' reluctance to question authority figures, like teachers.

"As a critical theorist, you are constantly deconstructing," she tells her pupils. "You are creating a learning space for your students. You are not defining them and saying, 'You sit here and this is what you do.'"

Across the country, schools are reducing the number of such courses, which have drawn ridicule from conservative scholars like Mr. Silber, who would rather see education students spend more time learning English and math than learning what he calls overly soft, touchy-feely approaches.

"We are moving away from the Mickey Mouse courses that always focus on development and method and not enough on content," said Richard Kunkel, dean of the College of Education at Auburn University in Alabama and executive director of the Holmes Partnership, a consortium of 120 universities seeking ways to improve teacher education. "Good training has a balance of content and practice."

Arturo Pacheco, the dean of El Paso's education school, defends the method courses as necessary to give teachers a grounding in how to approach their students and develop lessons. Nonetheless, the college in the last few years has scaled back on such on-campus classes in favor of a field-based approach. "Teachers are now prepared more like doctors and nurses, and less like philosophers or historians," he said.

Increasingly, medical schools are seen as models for teacher-preparation programs, which are driven more and more by the need to strike a better balance between teaching theories of learning and giving education students more practical, clinical experience in elementary and secondary classrooms.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future recommended such an approach in a report last year, suggesting that field experience be increased to a full school year instead of the typical half year, but under close supervision from instructors or "mentor teachers."

The report did not suggest abandoning theory and methodology courses, and to strong programs like El Paso's, striking a balance is key.

Even El Paso, though, has not been immune to the drive to raise standards. The education program has raised its minimum grade point average for admission (and staying in) to 2.5 from 2.25, and is requiring its 1,500 students to take additional math and science classes. El Paso has met the new state requirement, posting a 78 percent overall success rate on the certification exam, and about 70 percent for each minority group, including Hispanics, the largest group on campus.

The education program has restructured in the last few years, with the centerpiece the drive to increase preparation in the field. In keeping with the teaching-hospital model, seniors are called interns and spend about 600 to 700 hours in the field — double what they used to — at 25 "partner" schools.

They are like Christine Dalby, one of 13 interns spending this semester at Ascarate Elementary School.

"I could not imagine not having this experience," said Ms. Dalby, who found an answer to managing classroom discipline in Renee Reszel's sixth-grade room. "At the beginning of the class, she didn't discuss rules or anything like that. Instead, she works on the point system, where they get points for good behavior. It's all positive reinforcement."

But reality often clashes with the high ideals espoused in the lecture hall.

Colleges can instill in their students the best theory, the latest in methodology, but the effect of the teacher reform movement boils down to what happens when schools send their new recruits out to face veteran teachers and administrators suspicious of different ways of thinking.

Take Ms. Hadley, the enthusiastic intern determined not to be a "sage on the stage."

One day she was helping a veteran teacher at an elementary school with an exercise in which the pupils had to read a passage and then answer questions about it. Taking the initiative, Ms. Hadley saw an opportunity to make the lesson "more connected to real-life experience," she said. The passage dealt with developing a "world calendar," a reconfigured 364-day calendar in which numbered days of the month fall on the same weekday each year.

So Ms. Hadley had the students design their own calendars.

"They thought it was neat," she said. "Their birthdays fell the same day every year."

But inevitably, theory bumps into practice. What feedback did she get from the more tradition-bound classroom teacher?

"She called me a twit." ■

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Why So Many Underqualified High School Teachers?

The Case of Social Studies and History

By Richard M. Ingersoll

As a former high school history teacher, I always wince when I come across yet another assessment offering compelling evidence of how little American students know of our nation's history. Among the most disturbing of these has been the performance of students in U.S. history on the "nation's report card"—the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In recent years, the portion of high school seniors who do well on the NAEP history exams has been lower than in any other subject. For example, in the 1994 history exam, only one-tenth of seniors scored at an "acceptable" level, and over half could not show even partial knowledge of basic historical facts.

Typically, explanations of why students know so little about history focus on the content and rigor of social studies courses and high school graduation requirements. As a result, social studies textbooks, curricula, standards, and requirements have all been under intense scrutiny and revision in recent years. Very few critics, however, have recognized another important reason why our students don't know much about history: the phenomenon known as out-of-field teaching—teachers assigned to teach subjects for which they have little background training or education.

Educators have, of course, always been aware of the existence of out-of-field teaching, but an absence of accurate statistics on the problem has kept it largely unrecognized and long one of education's "dirty little secrets." This situation was remedied with the release, beginning in the early 1990s, of the Schools and Staffing Survey, a major new survey of the nation's elementary and secondary teachers conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education. Over the past five years, I have undertaken a research project that used this survey to determine how much out-of-field teaching goes on in this country and why.

I found, for instance, that about a fifth of all secondary-level social studies teachers in the United States do not have at least a minor in any social science, or in history, or in social studies education. When I focused on history alone, I found an even worse situation—53 percent of secondary-level history teachers are without a major or a minor in history itself. Comparable levels are found in the other core academic subjects; for example, a third of math teachers do not have at least a minor in math or math education.

Some people have expressed skepticism at these figures. Surely, they argue, things could not be *that* bad. Indeed, there is some merit to this skepticism. There is no doubt that some of these out-of-field teachers may actually be qualified, despite not having a minor or major in the subject. Some may be qualified by virtue of knowledge gained through previous jobs, through life experiences, or through informal training. Others may have completed substantial college coursework in a field, but not have gotten a major or minor.

But, my premise was that even a moderate number of teachers lacking the minimal prerequisite of a college minor signals the existence of serious problems in our schools. Just because someone has a major or minor does not, of course, guarantee they will be a quality teacher, nor even a qualified teacher. My assumption was that having a college minor is, however, a necessary prerequisite. In short, I assumed that few parents would expect their teenagers to be taught, for example, 11th grade world history by a teacher who did not have at least a minor in history or something related, such as social studies or one of the social sciences.

That is, however, precisely the case for well over 2 million secondary-level social studies students every year. Whether I examined teachers without a major or minor, or teachers without certification, the numbers were similarly alarming. I found, for example, that about a quarter of public secondary social studies teachers do not have teaching certificates in social studies. Indeed, when I upgraded the definition of a "qualified" teacher, for instance, to include only those who held *both* a college major and a teaching certificate in the field, the amount of out-of-field teaching substantially increased.

The negative implications of such high levels of out-of-field teaching are obvious and, not unexpectedly, the results of this research have generated widespread interest and have been featured in many national reports on education. But despite this attention, the problem of out-of-field teaching remains largely misunderstood. The crucial question, and the source of great misunderstanding, is why so many teachers have so little background in their fields.

Most assume that out-of-field teaching is a problem of poorly trained teachers. In this view, the preparation of teachers in college or university training programs lacks adequate rigor, breadth, and depth, especially in academic and substantive coursework, resulting in high levels of out-of-field teaching. Proponents of this view typically assume that the problem can be remedied by requiring prospective teachers to complete a "real" undergraduate major in an academic discipline. There is some truth to this explanation of out-of-field teaching, but it also overlooks an important source of the problem.

The data tell us that almost all teachers have completed an undergraduate education. Moreover, 94 percent of public school teachers and, surprisingly, over half of private school teachers hold regular state-approved teaching certificates. The data also tell us that most teachers have multiple degrees and have specialized in one or more fields or subjects. Indeed, almost half of all public school teachers have graduate degrees.

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Many of these teachers, of course, have degrees in education. But very few have only a "generic" education major or minor, such as in secondary education or curriculum and instruction, that lacks specialization in a subject. Only 3 percent of those teaching social studies, for instance, have a generic education degree. Over half have an academic major or a minor in one of the social sciences or in history. Another quarter are without an academic major or minor, but have a major or a minor in social studies education.

There is a great deal of controversy over whether subject-area education degrees, such as social studies education, are adequate. Critics argue that education degrees tend to be overloaded with required courses in education to the neglect of coursework in academic subjects. In fact, it is precisely because of the recognition of this problem that many states have, over the past decade, upgraded teacher education by, among other things, requiring education majors to complete substantial coursework in an academic discipline. As a result, one cannot assume that education degrees are without academic content. At the University of Georgia, for instance, a degree in social studies education requires as much coursework in an academic department, such as history, as does an academic degree itself. Likewise, a degree in math education requires as much coursework in the math department as does a degree in math.

Moreover, it is unrealistic to expect teachers in broad multidisciplinary fields, such as social studies and science, to have substantial coursework in all of the disciplines within the larger field. A teacher with a degree in biology and a certificate in science cannot be expected, for example, to be fully qualified in physics. Nevertheless, teachers in these broad fields are routinely required to teach any of a wide array of subjects within their departments.

My own case provides an illustration. I graduated from the University of California with a major in sociology and a minor in history. Several years later, I returned to school to take part in an intensive, yearlong teacher-certification program in social studies. Later, as a high school teacher, I felt prepared and comfortable teaching history, geography, or sociology, but neither prepared nor comfortable teaching an array of other social studies courses—world civilization, economics, psychology, political science, civics, or anthropology. Nevertheless, I was often assigned to teach many of these very courses.

My point is not to dismiss the importance of teacher education reforms. There is no question that the teaching force has and can continue to benefit from more rigorous education and training standards. My point is that such reforms alone will not eliminate the problem of out-of-field teaching because they do not address one of the major sources of the problem. The cause of out-of-field teaching lies not only in the amount of education or training teachers have, but also in the lack of fit between teachers' fields of preparation and their teaching assignments.

This is true for the fifth of those teaching social studies, mentioned above, who have neither a major nor a minor in any of the social sciences, in history, or in social studies education. Half of these out-of-field social studies teachers have education majors or minors in subjects such as art education or English education. The other half have academic majors or minors in disciplines such as art or English. In short, out-of-field social studies teachers rarely lack degrees or training in a specialty, they lack a major or minor in a subject related to social studies.

Again, my own case provides an illustration. Although I had a degree in sociology and history and a certificate in social studies, I was assigned to teach subjects such as special education, math, and English on a regular basis. In short, recruiting lots of new candidates into teaching and mandating more rigorous academic requirements for prospective teachers will not solve the problem if large numbers of such teachers continue to be assigned to teach subjects other than those for which they were trained.

Why then is there so much mismatch and misassignment in our schools? This question is especially pertinent for social studies because, unlike math and special education, one cannot fall back on the excuse of teacher shortages. Indeed, education policy research has long shown that social studies is a surplus field.

The answer, I believe, lies in a close examination of the way schools are run. Unlike traditional professions, teachers have only limited authority over key school decisions. The data show, for instance, that teachers have little say over which courses they are assigned, or misassigned, to teach. The allocation of teaching assignments is usually the prerogative of principals.

Principals not only have the authority to decide who teaches which courses, they also have an unusual degree of discretion. Teaching is subject to an elaborate array of state licensing requirements designed to assure the basic preparation and competence of practitioners. However, there is little regulation of how teachers are employed and assigned. Most states do, indeed, possess explicit policies acknowledging misassignment as an unsound practice. But unknown to the public, misassignment of teachers typically is permitted by state law. Some states

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have no regulations concerning teacher assignment. Others have regulations delimiting the extent to which administrators may assign teachers to subjects for which they are not officially qualified. But these standards are often not rigorous, penalties for non-compliance by schools are weak or rarely enforced, and most states routinely allow local school administrators to bypass even the limited requirements that do exist. The result is that misassignment is a legitimate administrative technique.

In this context, many principals find that assigning teachers to teach out of their fields of expertise is often not only legal but also more convenient, less expensive, or less time-consuming than the alternatives. For example, rather than find and hire a history teacher to teach a newly state-mandated advanced history curriculum, a principal may find it less expensive to assign an already employed social studies teacher to teach it, even if they have little background in history. When faced with the choice between hiring a fully qualified candidate for a vacant position or hiring a less qualified candidate who is also willing to coach a major varsity sport, a principal may find it more convenient to do the latter. If a teacher suddenly leaves in the middle of a semester, a principal may find it faster and cheaper to hire a readily available, but not fully qualified, substitute teacher, rather than conduct a formal search for a new teacher.

The degree to which a school is faced with problems of recruitment or retention may affect the extent to which the principal relies on these options, but they are available to almost all schools and used by many. In short, the managerial choice to misassign teachers may save time and money for the school, and ultimately taxpayers, but it is not cost free. One only has to look at the NAEP scores to see this.

The policy and reform implications of this view of out-of-field teaching are clear. The way to make sure there are qualified teachers in every classroom is not, for example, to assume the problem is due solely to a deficit in the quality or quantity of teachers. Schools are not simply victims, and shifting the entire blame to teachers, colleges of education, or larger forces of supply and demand only diverts attention from the way schools are managed and mismanaged. Moreover, reforms that ignore this may end up doing more harm than good. Recruitment and alternative training programs that, for instance, lower training or hiring standards could contribute to the underlying problem by continuing to treat teaching as semi-skilled work.

In the short term, there are a number of things school officials could do to reduce or prevent out-of-field teaching. When faced with hiring difficulties, schools could, for example, offer incentives or provide free retraining to attract and retain teachers. The data indicate that fewer than one-fifth of schools currently offer these options. Moreover, principals could cut back on out-of-field assignments for beginning teachers. The data show that new teachers leave the occupation at very high rates, and high rates of teacher turnover mean that schools are faced with a constant need to recruit and hire new teachers to fill vacated positions. Burdening beginners with out-of-field courses only contributes to the problem.

Ultimately, however, the way to upgrade the quality of teaching and teachers is to upgrade the quality of the teaching job. Well-paid, well-respected occupations that offer good working conditions rarely have difficulties with recruitment or retention. If they do, they do not resort to lowering standards as a coping mechanism. If we treated teaching as a highly valued profession, one requiring expertise and skill in a specialty, there would be little problem ensuring that all classrooms were staffed with qualified teachers. ■

The Wall Street Journal, October 5, 1998

Good Teachers Deserve a Tax Break

By JOHN SILBER

Massachusetts experienced a sharp reality check in April, when we joined the ranks of states testing prospective teachers. On the first round, 59% of the candidates—who a year ago would have been licensed—failed.

The results of these tests—which were no harder than those given to 10th-graders—elicited outrage from a public previously in denial. They also substantially reduced the pool of potential teachers in Massachusetts, even though a ballooning student population will require more teachers. Clearly, it will also require more *competent* teachers, who not only meet minimum requirements but are knowledgeable in their subjects.

One reason for the high failure rate is that we pay teachers as if we think their services are unimportant, and thus fail to attract high-quality applicants. Compared with other professionals, teachers start out low on the pay scale and never climb very high. In Massachusetts, the average starting salary is $25,000; the average maximum, $50,000. By contrast, law school graduates frequently earn $100,000 in their first year. New MBAs make nearly as much. Even toll collectors for the Massachusetts Turnpike, needing only a high school education, have a base salary of $32,000.

The prospects for narrowing these gaps are next to nonexistent. Many cities, their tax bases devastated by middle-class flight, cannot afford more for schools. In the suburbs, parents paying private tuition are unlikely to support higher taxes for the education of other parents' children.

The federal government is the only realistic hope for increasing teachers' salaries. Were the government to make the first $30,000 of a teacher's salary tax-exempt, it would in effect be providing the equivalent of a $9,000 raise. Such an exemption would have the added merit of not requiring a new bureaucracy or immense handling charges for routing taxpayer money through Washington.

This exemption should be available only to first-rate teachers: Those applying for the exemption should be required to pass a demanding test of their literacy and demonstrate mastery of their subject matter. This test should be designed by a panel of eminent teachers and scholars outside the public education establishment. It could be administered by the states, which might well decide to adopt it as their certification test.

Such a test is the only practical way to ensure that money is spent to attract and retain truly excellent teachers. In the unlikely case that all of the nation's teachers qualified for the exemption, the cost would be only 1.1% of the federal budget, or about $20 billion a year. On the more likely assumption that half would qualify, the cost would be about $10 billion.

If 0.55% of the federal budget is more than we're willing to pay to recruit and retain qualified teachers, the exemption could be restricted to elementary school teachers, who make up half the total number of teachers. Elementary education is the crucible of educational success and failure, and by improving its teachers we will also improve the performance of secondary school students. Approximately $5 billion, or 0.28% of the budget, would provide exemptions for half the nation's elementary teachers.

Failed education is an extravagant waste of resources. A clever advertising slogan says it all: If you think education is expensive, try ignorance. Washington spends $36,000 a year on each federal prisoner, and the states average $21,000. Prisoners pay little or no taxes, and once released, if they do not return to crime, they are as likely to be on welfare as to be gainfully employed taxpayers. By the narrowest definition of the term *welfare*, we spend some $250 billion a year on it. If by better teaching we alter a child's life path from that of a prisoner or welfare recipient to that of a self-reliant citizen, we pluck a brand from the burning and enrich the treasury. It is hard to imagine a more desirable turnaround.

Our school crisis has more causes than low pay for teachers. But if we wait until we can address all of these, we will never address any. The provision of teachers worthy of our children is a fundamental step in reversing the decline of the schools. The time to take this step is now.

Mr. Silber is chancellor of Boston University and chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Education.

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Washington Post, November 18, 1998

Poorly Performing D.C. Teachers to Face Penalties

By Valerie Strauss and Jay Mathews

D.C. School Superintendent Arlene Ackerman has instituted a new evaluation process that lets principals in the 146-school system fire poorly performing teachers if they show no improvement 90 days after being put on notice.

This de facto probationary period, one of the shortest in the nation, is Ackerman's latest effort to instill accountability in the beleaguered public school system. Since taking over as superintendent in May, the former Seattle educator has fired dozens of people for poor performance and instituted an evaluation process for principals that makes them responsible for improving student achievement.

Ackerman said the system cannot significantly improve without getting rid of bad teachers – a process that in the past has taken a year or longer. Principals, she stressed, need the authority to remove them quickly.

"There is a real public outcry for accountability," she said. "So now we are telling principals, 'Do it well, or we will hold you accountable.' There should be no excuses now."

Previous D.C. superintendents have pledged to remove ineffective teachers but never established a reliable process for implementing the dismissals. Moreover, according to school sources, most of the system's 5,000-plus teachers have received high ratings from their principals even though many don't deserve them. Evaluations for 1992, the last time they were made public, showed that only seven of 4,516 teachers were judged unsatisfactory.

Some teachers, who asked not to be identified, said they fear that principals might use the accelerated dismissal process to remove teachers they don't like – a concern shared by the Washington Teachers' Union and education advocates. Still, union President Barbara Bullock and others applauded the move.

Teachers "do have concerns, and we're going to try to stay on top of it," Bullock said. "This plan is not to be used for disciplinary actions. It is supposed to be a helping plan."

The union's ability to negotiate evaluation criteria was stripped by Congress several years ago, though Ackerman allowed union officials to participate in the drafting of the dismissal process.

Mary Levy, counsel for the education advocacy group Parents United, predicted that there will be "some unfortunate results" from this and other changes Ackerman is making.

"But if we want to move ahead and have good teaching in our system, it is a tool that principals need," she said. "What we have to do is figure out how we can build enough safeguards in so we don't have blatant bad behavior by principals."

But if the school system doesn't toughen teaching standards, Levy added, "we don't change anything worth changing."

Finding qualified teachers to replace those who are fired could be difficult. There is a national teacher shortage, with some jurisdictions offering financial incentives to attract the best. Teacher salaries in the District are lower than in neighboring jurisdictions, and one of Ackerman's first moves this year was to raise the pay of first-year teachers from about $27,000 to $30,000.

According to Ackerman and the document laying out the dismissal process, teachers are currently drawing up individual performance goals with their principals, setting targets for improving student achievement, professional performance and professional involvement. If a principal feels a teacher is ineffective, the two will draw up an improvement plan, and the teacher will be offered assistance from education tools and "learning teachers" to help him or her get better.

If no improvement is seen within 90 days, the teacher can be dismissed by the principal. Fired teachers can challenge the action through the union but won't be returned to a classroom unless they win.

Ackerman said the system is prepared to help struggling teachers, "but if you can't get there, it's unfair to the children. . . . You can either do the job or you can't."

Teachers who exceed performance goals by the end of the school year will thereafter be evaluated every three years, rather than every year. Educators rated as needing improvement will be given two years –

and school system assistance – to improve. If they don't measure up, termination will be recommended.

Dennis Johnson, the longtime principal of Terrell Elementary School in Southeast Washington, said the remedy for bad teaching in the past has boiled down to two words: "Transfer 'em." The new system, he said, will help each child get the best possible instruction. "But you have to be careful," he said. "A little bit of power is a dangerous thing."

William Blount, principal of C.W. Harris Elementary in Southeast Washington, said Ackerman's new dismissal system "unties your hands, and you have less paperwork to deal with. . . . I think most of the principals support it . . . and I think the teachers get a fair deal."

Edwin Bridges, an education professor at Stanford University, said the D.C. plan is part of a national trend toward accelerating the dismissal process. But Michael Casserly, executive director of the Washington-based Council of Great City Schools, said the 90-day period is short compared with what other major cities use.

In Arlington County, schools spokeswoman Lisa Farbstein said that "to move for dismissal and make it stick" takes at least a year.

In Montgomery County, removing an incompetent teacher also takes up to a year.

Staff writer Ellen Nakashima contributed to this report.

Boston Globe, November 9, 1998

Teachers union to urge new training

Asks task force to look at scrapping ed degree

By Beth Daley, Globe Staff

The Massachusetts Federation of Teachers wants to eliminate undergraduate degrees in education and instead require prospective teachers to devote all their time to studying academic subjects.

Then, after a master's degree program in teaching, all candidates would perform a one-year internship in a classroom before becoming certified, according to a list of 20 recommendations the union released this weekend.

But some professors and deans of area teacher colleges said yesterday that doing away with the education degree could result in teachers who are less prepared for the classroom. The education reform law of 1993 already requires teacher candidates to have a degree in an academic area, they said.

"Along with an undergraduate degree in arts and science, they are getting experience with children and learning about the content of teaching," said Mary Lou Thornburg, acting dean of the school of education at Bridgewater State College. "Also, if they don't [study teaching] until they are graduate students, how will they know they want to teach?"

But Massachusetts Federation of Teachers president Kathleen Kelley said undergraduate college students need to gain expertise in a subject before trying to teach it to children.

"Certainly you need teachers who are skilled, but you also need people who really know what their content area is," said Kelley. "We need to make sure teachers are prepared for a particular subject," she said.

The 15,000-member union, the second largest in the state and made up largely of urban school teachers, wants Governor Paul Cellucci to appoint a task force of teachers and state officials to make recommendations to the Legislature. Cellucci could not be reached for comment yesterday.

After almost 60 percent of prospective teachers failed a new state teacher competency exam last spring, teachers have been under fire from state politicians and some members of the public for lacking basic knowledge in some subjects. Since then, several strategies to improve teacher quality - including decertifying colleges where more than 20 percent of teacher candidates repeatedly fail the test - have been put into place.

Kelley and the union's executive board members said teachers and state officials need to work together on a task force to improve teacher quality. They want the task force appointed before the end of the year.

"Rather than taking potshots at teachers, you will have all these people sitting down at the same time looking at this," said Ed Doherty, a member of the executive board and head of the teachers union in Boston. "We all want to work on teacher quality."

Kelley said teachers would have ample time to study their craft under the union's proposals.

Most schools of education already require teacher candidates to student-teach, usually for a semester. Some schools, such as Simmons College, have yearlong internships for master's degree candidates.

At present, any teacher hired without a master's degree must obtain it within five years; the state is looking at extending that to 10 years. By contrast, the union's proposal would, in effect, require teachers to have a master's before they set foot in the classroom.

Most of the deans and college professors contacted yesterday said they like the idea of more teacher training, as long as it does not affect a prospective teacher's schooling.

"The idea of having a heavy dose of clinical training is crucial," said Jerome Murphy, dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Students at Harvard are often in the classroom and are paired with mentors and supervisors to learn how to teach. But, he said, all students also need time to reflect on teaching practices and research new methods.

The union also wants the state to stop granting waivers that allow school districts to hire uncertified teachers. Kelley estimated that hundreds of teachers are teaching subjects in which they lack training.

The Washington Post, November 8, 1998

The Hurdles You Have to Jump

By Elizabeth Greenspan

I never appreciated the anxiety of finding a job until I returned to college in September for my senior year. Many nightly conversations with fellow students, which always used to be about current classes or upcoming vacations, have turned into brainstorming sessions about life after graduation.

Since working with people is important to many of us, as well as finding a job that is intellectually challenging, teaching often comes up as a possibility. The more we talk about it though, the clearer it becomes that very few of us will go into teaching, and those who do probably won't end up in public schools.

Salary may steer some of us clear of the profession, but money is not the overwhelming factor in our discussions. More relevant are the limited and confining paths into the teaching field and the strong stigma that has become associated with schools of education and, therefore, with teaching itself.

Teaching in a public school requires certification, through either a master's or an undergraduate degree in education. That certification qualifies you to teach in one state and may or may not be accepted elsewhere. Some states, like New York, also require teachers to undergo additional training every five years. While certification sounds like a good way to insure that our schools have qualified teachers, I feel the current system is keeping away many good potential teachers.

My friend Seth Pollack has decided he wants to teach, but because he is not now certified, his options are limited. He knows he could go to an education school for a master's degree, but, like many other students here, he believes these programs are "a waste of time," and he thinks the recent failure of aspiring teachers in Massachusetts to pass basic math and literacy exams simply proves his point.

It is the road to certification, then, rather than a lack of interest, that steers us away from teaching. Education programs—and this is particularly true of undergraduate courses—tend to focus on teaching theory and leave the graduates I've talked to unprepared to stand in front of a class of 12-year-olds every day, trying to guide them through diagramming a sentence. My friend Carrie Van Wyk, who recently graduated from Penn State's education program, told me that not only did she contend with four years of badgering for choosing an "easy" major, but that she'd had only one opportunity to student teach.

Haverford, like many other liberal arts schools, has a certification program that provides students with both a teaching certificate and a liberal arts degree in their chosen discipline. In order to complete this program within four years, students have to commit to it by the end of their sophomore year. Aimee Brown, who's majoring in English, did complete the concentration, but she says she knew before she came to college that she wanted to teach in public schools. And, even for someone as focused as she is, fulfilling the concentration's requirements was difficult; she had to organize her own independent classes in the department, she said, and spend summers completing course work.

Not surprisingly, then, the majority of my friends who want to teach will do so in private schools, even though the pay tends to be lower still. That seems to be the general pattern for Haverford graduates, according to Marjorie Merklin, who is the program administrator and adviser of the college's education program. Private schools don't require their teachers to be certified, and they conduct aggressive on-campus recruiting sessions to find would-be teachers. It is almost too easy to find a job at a private or independent school, Merklin told me: "As a result, even certified students go to private schools."

But for some of my uncertified friends, like Seth, private schools do not offer enough challenge or diversity. They find alternative teaching programs more appealing, because they are a back-door route into the public schools. The national Teach

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for America (TFA) program is one of the most popular. Funded partly through AmeriCorps and partly through corporate donations, TFA places newly graduated college students in some of the most understaffed school districts in the country for a two-year period. Started in 1990 by a Princeton University graduate, TFA chooses 500 liberal arts students from 3,000 applicants each year—most from elite colleges and universities. The summer before entering the classroom, all participants go through a five-week education program that covers teaching techniques and lesson plans.

TFA has been successful in attracting liberal arts students into the teaching field. Last year it accepted six seniors from Haverford, and this year many of my friends are applying. It's not just that they would rather spend just five weeks instead of a full two years preparing to teach; several students have told me that they are drawn to the recognition that the highly competitive program brings, as well as the continuing support and respect the institution provides to young teachers when they are in the classroom.

That support has meant a lot to Rishi Bhandari, a graduate of Vassar College who has completed his first year teaching in a Baltimore public school under TFA. For the new teachers in many public schools, older teachers or administrators offer little help, he said, but from TFA, "we can expect support." In addition, those who participate in TFA feel they have achieved something just by being accepted. And while Rishi admitted to me that the summer training in Houston did not prepare him well for the classroom, leaving him "blindsided" by his seventh-graders, he told me that he didn't think he was at any more of a disadvantage than some of his fellow teachers who had come through a traditional education program.

The very aspects that make this program appealing to students like Rishi provoke criticism from some education experts. "The notion of throwing people into teaching is foolish," says Bil Johnson, a professor of education at Brown University. "It is a rare individual [who] knows how to teach." He labels TFA "hideously elitist."

Others argue that TFA teachers use the program as a two- or three-year respite before moving on to other careers. So far, the data suggests otherwise. In the eight years of TFA's existence, 56 percent of its participants have stayed in teaching after their two years are up.

In addition to TFA and some citywide projects, there are a few state programs that allow liberal arts students to teach in public schools. New Jersey created an alternative teaching certification program in 1984. It places liberal arts grads in schools as long as they pass a test on the subject they plan to teach. Each student is trained by a veteran teacher throughout the first year and attends after-hours classes on teaching theory to catch up with new teachers who went through certification programs.

When I spoke with Ellen Schechter, who was hired to run the program for the Division of Academic and Career Standards at the New Jersey Board of Education, she said that these "alternate routers" do well in the classroom and do not seem to suffer from inadequate preparation.

The number of liberal arts students who have joined the New Jersey program has nearly doubled—713 are entering schools this fall. "If you only allowed education majors to be teachers," Schechter points out, "it is a very narrow pool." Unlike many other states, where the lack of available teachers has even prompted emergency placements in recent months, New Jersey is not facing any teacher shortages—a fact that Schechter directly attributes to their program. The alternate routers have a significantly lower attrition rate than traditional routers during the first year of teaching, she said, and over time have proven to be just as likely to stay in the field.

I'm convinced that if more states had programs like New Jersey's, and if universities offered stronger curriculums, more students—including many of my friends at Haverford—would become teachers in public schools. If that were the case, my friends and I would be staying up late talking about where and what we plan to teach.

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William Raspberry

Soldiers to Scholars

You don't have to admonish Alzo J. Reddick to pull himself together. The University of Central Florida educator has made a second career of pulling himself together, weaving the disparate elements into a potentially transforming approach to education.

There's Alzo, the burly footballer who boasts of playing (he doesn't say how successfully) against Deacon Jones when both were high school jocks in Orlando. There's Sarge Reddick, who decided 30-odd years ago that a military career wasn't for him and who landed a job as high school teacher and coach within a month after leaving the service. There's Doc Reddick, whose doctorate in education attests to his determination to be a leader in his profession. There's state Rep. Reddick, a member of the Florida legislature since 1982. And, of course, there's Alzo "The Dreamer" Reddick, who came up with the UCF program he calls "Soldiers to Scholars."

Reddick says that his program is an adaptation of "Troops to Teachers," an alternative certification idea that came out of the American Federation of Teachers a few years back. But what an adaptation. "You're right," he told me after reading my recent column on alternative certification for public school teachers. "Recruiting teachers for inner cities is especially difficult. We need highly motivated, positive role models, particularly in the African American community. The military does provide a ready source of these types of can-do individuals, but many of them leave the service ineligible for the Troops to Teachers program—even though many of them do have excellent leadership skills and a strong desire to teach."

"Soldiers to Scholars" recruits these former service members, enrolls them in college and points them toward careers in teaching. "That's just the beginning, though," Reddick told me. "When these soldiers enter our program, they agree to live in an inner-city apartment complex, provide after-school mentoring for at-risk children at a nearby elementary school, and act as positive role models in their community—all while taking classes as full-time students."

The results, he says, include the creation of a cadre of male role models for neighborhoods in which they are in notoriously short supply and the transformation of Orlando's drug-ridden Franciscan Apartments into the safer, cleaner, drug-free Madison Point Apartments.

"The idea came out of my work as educator and legislator," he says. "It dawned on me that the people I would see in prisons when I made my rounds of the state correctional facilities as a member of the legislature were just grown-up versions of the kids I saw in special-ed classes as a teacher. It became something of a fixation with me to try to do something about it."

He talked Central Florida into establishing a special program for former service members interested in teaching, and he talked the Florida Housing Corp. into subsidizing the Madison Point rent for his recruits. "They get a three-fifths housing subsidy and free tuition, but no salary, while they are in school. We require them to live in the complex, to do volunteer service, keep their grades up and work toward on-time graduation," he says.

"Most are black men, mostly single, but one of the beauties of the program is that we've also had a number of families in the program. I can't tell you what a profound impact our scholars have on this one community [which includes what used to be five of Orlando's lowest-achieving schools]—and what impact they could have in so many troubled areas. And schools are waiting for our graduates. I have a guy who's graduating next month and has three job offers even before he completes certification."

Soldiers to Scholars, launched in 1995, boasts just 10 graduates so far, six or seven teaching in Orange County schools. But 27 enrollees now are living at Madison Point. Says Reddick: "We have successfully taken two negatives—downsized military personnel and the urban education crisis—and created a positive: excellent teachers and role models for the children who need them most."

That's one way of looking at it. I prefer to think that this remarkable man took inventory of the elements that make up his experience, his assets and his most basic concerns—and pulled himself together.

The Wall Street Journal, November 23, 1998

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Curriculum & Content

We lead with an editorial by E.D. Hirsch, founder of the Core Knowledge Foundation, from the *Richmond Times Dispatch*. In "All Children Can Master Basic Knowledge," Hirsch asserts that all youngsters, regardless of racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic background, can master the basics by starting early and working hard. Since student achievement is not determined by innate characteristics, schools should focus on encouraging effort, rather than blaming ability.

Next, "Far and Wide: Developing and Disseminating Research-Based Programs," an article by Robert Slavin found in *American Educator*, discusses how well-researched and tested designs can be successfully replicated in schools. Rather than making each teacher create his or her own pedagogy and curriculum and thereby continually reinventing the wheel, schools should use methods and materials that are part of a high quality packaged program. (Of course, Slavin wouldn't mind if schools buy *his* packaged program, Success for All.) We suggest you get hold of the Fall 1998 issue of *American Educator* because it features several excellent articles on fixing low-performing schools. For a copy, contact the American Federation of Teachers at (202) 879-4420.

James Traub, in his *New Republic* article, "Multiple Intelligence Disorder," blasts Howard Gardner's celebrated theory of multiple intelligences. It's about time someone did, as the education world has been consumed by the MI juggernaut.

Finally, David J. Hoff's *Education Week* article, "Math Council Again Mulling Its Standards," discusses the greater emphasis that the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics has placed on basic skills in the draft revisions of its new math standards. Perhaps a truce in the math wars lies ahead.

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All Children Can Master Basic Knowledge

Charlottesville School Shows How

E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

What would it take to make Virginia public schools better and more equitable? We know some of the answers, because some of our existing public schools have already raised achievement not just in average scores, but also in narrowing the achievement gap between rich and poor students.

Take the Paul H. Cale elementary school near Charlottesville. It is a regular public school with children who come from middle-class homes as well as children from the trailer park. Its test scores have risen from near the bottom to the upper middle of the pack, comparable to more affluent schools. More than 40 percent of Cale students qualify for free and reduced-price lunches -- meaning they come from near-poverty families. When these demographics were taken into account in a recent analysis conducted by the district, the scores of Cale were relatively higher and more equitable than any other school in its district.

This school happens to be a so-called "Core Knowledge School" -- one which follows a very specific and solid year-by-year curriculum. As president of the Core Knowledge Foundation, I'm not going to abuse the editor's hospitality by advertising that particular reform. The task of making all of our public schools as equitable as Cale can be defined in more general terms, without focusing on Core Knowledge at all. That's especially true in Virginia, which has the most explicit and, on the whole, best statewide content standards in the nation -- the Virginia Standards of Learning.

Leadership From Principal

The first thing that had to happen at Cale was for teachers to agree that each grade should have a common, solid core curriculum. That change of heart did not require the seductions of money (though modest extra money would have helped in the first year to buy library books and release time for teachers to learn the new subjects they would teach). It mainly took leadership. In Cale it came from an outstanding principal, Gerald Terrell. But the necessary leadership could have come from the superintendent, parents, or from respected members of the faculty. All these different kinds of leaders have successfully transformed a school by persuading its teachers to focus on common academic content and hard work.

The Cale experience has been repeated in dozens of different ways in some 800 Core Knowledge schools spread over 44 states. Teachers were not pressured and threatened; they were genuinely persuaded. By argument, observation, and their own experiences, they were led to the view that all children can succeed in the early grades when solid, demanding content is coupled with practice and hard work -- common-sense principles that are quite distinct from those most teachers received in the education schools that they were compelled to attend.

After two decades of involvement in school reform, I have come to think that persuading teachers and administrators to accept these propositions about solid, grade-by-grade content and hard work is an essential (and underestimated) requirement for significant school improvement. By no means do I oppose governance reforms like charter schools and public-school choice. I agree that competition is more likely than monopoly to produce good schools. But governance reforms will continue to disappoint us if they are not accompanied by intellectual reforms, though the reverse isn't necessarily true. The Cale school, for instance, did not experience any governance reforms. The rules and regulations of its county school board, district office, and principal all remained in place.

Public Schools Ignored Cale

Nor did the example of the Cale school work market magic on neighboring schools by spurring them to emulate what Cale had accomplished in improving equity. Why didn't they take clues from Cale? It wasn't simply because public schools aren't required to compete with each other, though that surely must reduce the urgency for improvement. Teachers as a group desire what is best for their children. Yet there continues to be disagreement about what is "best." After all, the more affluent schools were still scoring better or just as well as Cale.

The nearby schools failed to match Cale's equity results not because of laziness or lack of concern, but rather because received ideas are extremely hard to change. Shifts of ideas are hard to accomplish even in the economic sphere -- as Maynard Keynes understood when he wrote: "Soon or late, it is ideas, not vested interests, that are dangerous for good and evil." He also said: "The ideas of economists and philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. . . . Practical men who believe themselves exempt from any intellectual influence are usually the slaves of some defunct economist."

The dominant ideas in U.S. education are especially hard to resist, because they are so attractive and child-centered. Young children, it is said, are not ready for hard or abstract schoolwork, which is "developmentally inappropriate" and even harmful.

In later grades, factual knowledge is disparaged because "critical thinking" and "understanding" are more important than "rote memorizing of mere facts." These slogans are doubly attractive because they fit the early-childhood romanticism that has been part of our culture since the 19th Century, when Elizabeth Peabody started our first kindergarten. "Kindergarten" means children-garden -- a place where children are expected to develop naturally.

American ideas about education were born in the Enlightenment. Jefferson stressed the need for hard work and factual learning at an early age. But most of our ideas were formed by 19th-Century romantics who proposed that children should blossom naturally. We are inheritors of both traditions. On the one side we have the hard-work tradition of Jefferson and Horatio Alger -- rising from rags to riches by knowledge and hard work.

On the other side, we have our romantic individualism: wishing every child to flower in its own natural way. We need a better balance between these two traditions. A first step to that end will be to de-polarize our present educational debates. Readers of this newspaper are familiar with the polarities that dominate current discussions about our schools. Here are just a few:

- Phonics vs. Whole Language
- Learning the Multiplication Table vs. Grasping Math Concepts
- Factual Knowledge vs. Critical Thought
- Memorizing vs. Deep Understanding
- Objective Tests vs. Authentic Assessment
- Extrinsic Rewards vs. Intrinsic Interest
- Objective Achievement vs. Self-Esteem
- Uniformity vs. Diversity
- Effort vs. Ability

Labeling the Oppositions

Each of these polarities merits a book-length discussion, but I shall simply call attention to the oddity that one side of these oppositions is labeled "conservative" and the other side "liberal." Is factual knowledge Republican and critical thinking Democratic? Are extrinsic rewards Republican, and intrinsic interest Democratic? Is effort Republican, ability Democratic? The retreat to political labels reflects what one scholar in a different context has called "thought fatigue." After a while, people just stop thinking and take a stand. It's tiring constantly to confront the complexities of education with a flexible mind. It's easier to politicize the debate.

Almost all the reforms I currently advocate happen to be on the so-called conservative side of the ledger, and some of my colleagues suspect me of being a closet Republican. Yet under different circumstances, I might advocate some of the "liberal" slogans. The polar oppositions mostly exist on a continuum, and many of them merge into their opposites. For instance, academic achievement is not opposed to but leads to self-esteem. Factual knowledge leads to critical thought. Our thinking about education needs to be more contextual. The decision about which end of the continuum should be stressed depends on the historical moment.

For many decades, our schools have adhered to the anti-fact, romantic tradition, and now we need a strong temporary, counter-emphasis on stern Enlightenment principles in order to achieve a more balanced approach. In the 1800s I would have advocated romantic reforms. Nowadays, we need to stress the things the romantics were reacting against: book learning, factual knowledge, practice, and hard work.

Especially, we need to de-emphasize the romantic over-emphasis on innate ability rather than effort. It's convenient to think that poor children are destined to be low achievers in school because of social forces and innate differences. Yet some schools manage to bring all children to grade level.

All Children Can Learn

Effort is more important than ability in school. By starting early enough, and working hard enough, all children can read, write, and calculate at grade level or above. Students' achievements are not innately determined by their social disadvantages or their different "intelligences" and "learning styles." Since Jefferson and Horace Mann -- our two great visionaries of American public education -- leveling the playing field has been and continues to be the authentic aim of public schooling. I'll end by quoting Horace Mann:

Enlarging the cultivated class or caste will open a wider area over which the social feelings will expand; and if this education should be universal and complete, it would do more than all things else to obliterate [artificial] distinctions in society.

Today, we know enough to make that vision a reality. But to attain it we will need to overcome thought-fatigue, and renounce slogans and facile political polarizing of the complexities of education.

American Educator, Fall, 1998

FAR AND WIDE

Developing and Disseminating Research-Based Programs

BY ROBERT SLAVIN

EVERY METROPOLITAN area has at least one widely known school that has been able to demonstrate, year after year, extraordinary student performance. When these schools serve poor and minority children, they are often held up as examples of what all schools could achieve with at-risk children.

On further examination, these exemplary schools sometimes turn out to be less than extraordinary because they operate under conditions that other schools cannot emulate. Some are magnet schools that can select their students (and reject those who are difficult to teach). Some have high levels of funding or other special circumstances. Yet it is not unusual to find schools with none of these special circumstances that are nevertheless producing outstanding student success.

Exemplary schools that operate without the extras play an important role in broader school reform because they demonstrate that all children can learn. When the late Ron Edmonds made his famous claim that "wherever and whenever we choose [we can] successfully teach all children...,"[1] he was saying that the existence of even a handful of exemplary schools serving poor and minority children demonstrates beyond any doubt that the fault is in our education system, not in our children.

The problem, however, with exemplary schools is that we have not known how to replicate them. So they have provided visions of what *can* be done but not models of *how* to achieve excellence in the thousands of schools that need improvement. Often, an exemplary school will be just down the street from a school serving the same neighborhood that is producing results that are far from exemplary. Even the exemplary schools themselves don't remain consistent over time; changes in principals, key staff, district policies, funding, or even just the passage of time may undermine a school that once gave poor, minority children an education equal to the best.

Robert Slavin, the developer of Success for All, is currently co-director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk in Baltimore, Maryland.

What practices create a successful school? And even harder, if we isolate these practices, how can we make sure they become commonplace? Though replicability is not the same thing as excellence, the question of how to disseminate existing programs, in particular, has consumed researchers and reformers for decades. Yet finally, a confluence of developments in research and in policy has produced a breakthrough that allows us to replicate programs in thousands of schools.

Replicable Reform Designs

What has happened is that a number of organizations, mostly universities, have developed, evaluated, and learned how to disseminate programs capable of translating best practices into replicable individual programs and replicable schoolwide reform designs[2]. These programs vary widely in their particulars, but all are built around the idea that externally developed programs, with appropriate adaptations to local circumstances, can be disseminated to hundreds or thousands of schools. Our own program, Success for All, is in more than 1,100 schools in forty-four states (and five foreign countries). Henry Levin's Accelerated Schools model is also in more than a thousand schools. James Comer's School Development program is in about six hundred, as is a program called High Schools That Work. Schoolwide programs based on Direct Instruction reading and mathematics programs are used in more than a hundred schools. Core Knowledge is rapidly expanding in hundreds of schools. A set of eight comprehensive programs funded by the nonprofit New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC) is used in several hundred schools. In addition, there are dozens of replicable programs in every subject and for every grade level, as well as replicable programs for dropout prevention, tutoring, and so on.

Some of these programs are carefully structured, with specific student materials, teachers' manuals, training procedures, and other elements, while others provide powerful ideas and connections with other innovative schools but expect teachers

ILLUSTRATED BY BRI ASSOCIATES

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and other educators to create all the classroom strategies and materials for themselves. Some are extensively researched and have undergone independent evaluations, while others can only point to a few schools (perhaps out of many) that have made substantial gains in a given year, and some lack even this type of evidence. Yet what all of these programs share is that they were designed from the outset to be replicated.

One of the most important factors in the successful replication of a reform design is the process by which a school adopts one of these designs. The selection must be based on a voluntary choice made by the professionals in the school. Our own programs require an informed vote by secret ballot and a supermajority of at least 80 percent of a school's teachers, and we do everything in our power to see that the vote is free and uncoerced. We try to make sure that teachers have visited other Success for All schools, had access to written materials and videotapes, and had opportunities to question program representatives before they make this important decision. Most other programs use similar procedures.

This buy-in process ensures that the overwhelming majority of educators who will actually carry out the reform had a decisive role in selecting it and are therefore committed to high-quality, thoughtful implementation. Admittedly, given the pressures on schools to do something about student achievement *right away*, it can be difficult to make sure that teachers have the chance for an uncoerced choice. It is nonetheless essential. In our own research, we have found that poor implementation can usually be traced to a hasty, poorly informed or pressured choice that failed to secure the commitment of the school staff to put their hearts and minds behind making the program work.[3]

However, this is not to underplay the importance of the implementation process in replicating a reform design. A Success for All implementation involves training teachers so that they fully understand both the ideas behind the design and the specific procedures and practices they will be following and adapting for use in the classroom. It involves coaching and being coached and constant assessment of students to see if they are moving ahead or falling behind. And it involves learning how to use parents as an important resource. The network of Success for All schools, a continuing resource for all participating schools, can play an especially important role when a school is implementing the program. The network allows those involved to share ideas and strategies with people in other schools and work through problems they are having. Ultimately, the network also helps build a common language and norms of professionalism and collaboration.

Discrediting the Rand 'Change Agent' Study

The existence and widespread dissemination of comprehensive programs have discredited once and for all the influential Rand "change agent" study of the 1970s.[4] The change agent study concluded that lasting and effective school reform could only take place if the participants themselves designed and carried out their own innovations. Based in part on this study, school reformers often came to believe that even well-developed, well-designed school change models could never work, could never be maintained, and could never be replicated. People in each school had to try to reinvent the wheel—and hope they were not proceeding on a faulty premise.

The belief that reform has to take place school by school and cannot be promoted by external agencies led to despair of ever achieving widespread reform, and this was a major reason for the embrace at the policy level of "systemic" reforms. Systemic reforms concentrated instead on district and statewide and even national reforms such as changes in assessment, accountability, standards, governance, the introduction of charters or privatization or other innovations that did not directly change classroom practice. The theory was that only reforms like these were likely to make a difference on a substantial scale; and systemic reforms did bring about some important changes. Standards and accountability, for example, have made us look anew at what students can be expected to achieve and how we can measure their achievement. And they have been essential in motivating the search for effective programs and giving schools feedback on the results of their new programs.

However, recent research confirms what common sense also tells us. Systemic changes mandated from Washington or from state capitals do not have a sufficiently powerful effect on student achievement unless they are coupled with reforms that directly target classroom practices. In addition to knowing what their students should be learning—and whether they are meeting external standards—teachers also need effective, well-tested, and replicable classroom techniques to help them guide their students' learning. Replicable reform models that are selected by educators and provide materials and support for teachers who put the programs into practice can be used in thousands of schools, and they offer a promising antidote to top-down policies.

The advantages of having well-worked-out programs to adopt or adapt, rather than having every teacher or school try to reinvent the wheel, are many. First, a program developer has far more time and resources to try out many draft prototypes, get feedback from many teachers, see the effects on many different types of children, and continually revise the program until it is practical and effective. In addition to sound materials, program developers can work out assessments and training procedures. A widely used program is also likely to have videotapes demonstrating effective practices and a network of implementing schools that gives teachers opportunities to share ideas, adaptations, supplementary materials, and so on. Program developers have the time and resources to follow developments in research, adapt to changes in standards, and keep up with the latest trends in curriculum. They are able to evaluate their program (though, unfortunately, not all do so). This is not to say that teachers cannot create their own effective innovations—far from it. Yet the great majority of teachers prefer to

innovate beginning from a solid base of materials and methods, rather than starting from scratch. Given the enormous job teachers have to do just to teach every day, it is unrealistic and unwise to expect them to invent everything they use.

The rationale behind the Rand change agent study, still believed by many educators and academics, is that teachers will not implement an externally developed program because they themselves were not involved in creating it. This is half true; if external reforms are forced on teachers, they may, in fact, resist or engage in only token or surface compliance. However, if teachers have taken part in identifying a program that is appropriate and practical for their school, and if they have been involved in modifying the program to fit their needs, they are likely to feel ownership and commitment. It is the buy-in process used with most current reform models that makes the change agent study wrong. It is not necessary for teachers to invent a program in order for them to be fully committed to making it a success; it is necessary that they have unfettered choice.

The insistence that each teacher develop his or her own teaching tools, techniques, and even curriculum materials is unique to the education profession. What physician would ignore the research, pass up the array of available medications, and make up his or her own concoctions? What farmer would try to develop new seeds or better tractors just for use on his or her own farm? In every successful part of our economy, professionals select and intelligently apply well-developed tools rather than inventing new ones exclusively for their own use. Why should education be different? Can it afford to be?

Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD)

Recently, the U.S. Congress passed an important bill to support the adoption of comprehensive reform designs, ones that affect all aspects of school functioning. The 1997 Education Appropriations bill crafted by Congressmen David Obey and John Porter allocated a total of $145 million, most of which is to provide grants of at least $50,000 per year for up to three years to schools proposing to adopt comprehensive reform designs. This Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program, now just getting under way, will help schools pay for the start-up costs of adopting programs that affect all aspects of school function. Each state is establishing its own guidelines and review procedures, but most will focus the available money on relatively high-poverty, low-achieving schools.

For the first time, CSRD puts serious money behind supporting programs that can be replicated. If it lives up to its potential, it could be extremely important in disseminating proven programs. However, there is a serious problem with CSRD. As it is currently written, the legislation sets relatively low standards of research evidence for the programs it now funds. It is not hard to understand why. Until now, there has been no demand that programs back up their claims of effectiveness with research. So there are too few programs with solid evidence of success to serve the more than two thousand schools likely to be funded in the first round (1998-99). However, if CSRD funding continues, there is a good chance that evaluation standards will become more stringent.

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Resources

Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Web Site (www.aft.org/edissues/csrd). Find out how your school or district can participate in a three-year federal program, which, in its initial year, will provide $145 million to help improve low-performing schools—especially those serving economically disadvantaged students. The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program, also known as "Obey-Porter," will fund schools to select and adopt research-based, whole-school reform models that can prove their effectiveness and replicability. AFT's CSRD web site includes materials, contact information, and Internet links to give states, districts and schools the necessary information about CSRD. The site also includes a calendar of nationwide events on school reform and CSRD.

Raising Student Achievement: A Resource Guide to Redesigning Low-Performing Schools. Designed to provide ideas, information and materials, the guide includes profiles of research-proven, schoolwide programs; materials to audit a school for its most pressing needs; and a review of contract language that supports reform and protects the rights of staff members during the transition. Available on AFT's web site (www.aft.org/edissues/rsa).

What Works. A series that provides information about research-based programs. Currently available: "Six Promising Schoolwide Reform Programs" and "Seven Promising Reading and English Language Arts Programs." Single copies free from AFT Order Department, 555 New Jersey Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20001. Also available on AFT's web site (www.aft.org/edissues/whatworks/index.htm).

Every Child Reading: An Action Plan. Outlines research-based practices for helping children become successful readers and presents a plan for reforming reading instruction that covers professional development for teachers; early childhood and community outreach; and research, development, and materials. Sponsored by the Learning First Alliance, a coalition of 12 national education organizations. Write AFT Order Department and ask for item 180. Single copies are $5; $3 for five or more.

Principles for Professional Development. AFT guidelines for reviewing, evaluating, improving, and designing professional development programs. Write AFT Order Department and ask for item 176. Single copies are $2; $1 for five or more.

—AFT Educational Issues Department

FAR AND WIDE

(Continued from page 11)

As more programs are developed in response to the demand, developers are likely to find that, if they can establish their programs' effectiveness, they will be more competitive. If that happens, schools will have what is now seldom available to them: rigorous program evaluations that compare the achievement gains of schools using a particular design with matched control schools. This, in turn, will provide an impetus for independent evaluations, including studies carried out by states and large districts. If this supply-and-demand process works as it should, the result will be better and better programs that have to meet ever-higher standards of effectiveness and replicability.

It is not certain, of course, that CSRD will succeed. Without careful attention to the quality of implementation of the programs adopted and without a toughening over time of the standards used to determine that programs are instructionally effective, CSRD could become just one more federal program shoveling money into the schools with little result. Lawmakers should be eager, long before that happens, to insist on more rigorous standards. Indeed, if the process of toughening standards takes too long, the program could also be dangerously weakened. Yet there is an exciting potential for fundamental change if states, districts, and schools understand the need for demanding proven programs—and the danger of taking promotional brochures at face value—and if they use the CSRD process as a means of setting high standards for educational innovation.

If the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program does succeed, it could be the model for even more far-reaching change. In 1999, Title I will be up for reauthorization. At $8 billion, Title I is by far the largest resource for change in high-poverty schools. Historically, Title I was used for remedial services, but increasingly it has been used to enable schools to adopt programs that affect the entire school. Again, if CSRD develops the rigorous standards for program adoption that it needs, the effect on achievement in Title I schools could be momentous.

The Memphis City school system is likely to be a test ground for whole-school reform. Beginning in 1995, Memphis implemented a variety of New American Schools programs, plus two others. Additional schools will participate each year until all the schools have chosen a new program. An independent evaluation of achievement outcomes on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) found that, across the board, elementary schools in Memphis implementing comprehensive designs experienced substantially greater gains than a matched control group, than other Memphis schools, and than Tennessee schools generally.[5] We will have to await further evaluations to assess the relative success and lasting impact of the various models. However, the results of dozens of studies of individual programs that we already have give us a picture of what the Memphis results are likely to be. These studies demonstrate the potential of comprehensive reform designs that have a solid research base to substantially improve student achievement. In general, the programs that produce the largest and most consistent learning gains are those that are most completely worked out.[6] These are programs that are more than just good ideas. Instead, they incorporate materials, assessments, teaching manuals, training procedures, and other resources and supports to facilitate high-quality implementation.

Bringing Education into the Twentieth Century

At the dawn of the 21st century, it's time that education reform enters the 20th. In technology, medicine, agriculture, engineering, and other fields, a process of development, evaluation, and dissemination continually improves products and techniques. Professionals make choices among a variety of proven, effective materials and strategies, and then apply them as appropriate to various situations. In contrast, education reform goes from fad to fad, with little attention to rigorous evidence. This must change if education reform is to make substantial progress over time. The development and dissemination of whole-school reform programs, the passage of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration, and other developments bring us an important step closer to reform based on evidence rather than fashion. We're moving beyond islands of excellence and beginning to learn how to make what is now extraordinary the norm. Our children deserve no less.

The message of this article is one of hope and urgency. Schools can do a much better job of educating all students, especially low-income and minority students, using methods and materials that are readily available. There are approaches that are effective and appropriate for a wide variety of objectives. The existence of these approaches demonstrates that the low achievement of so many students placed at risk is not inevitable. We need not wait for social or political transformation to dramatically improve educational outcomes for students at risk of school failure. If we were to use what we know now about programs that work, we could make an enormous difference in the lives of all our children. □

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The New Republic, October 26, 1998

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE DISORDER

By James Traub

Howard Gardner first realized that he had struck a chord in the national psyche when he gave a speech to private-school administrators on his new theory of "multiple intelligences" and saw the headmasters elbowing each other to get into the hall. That was in 1983. Since that time, Gardner, a Harvard professor who still carries a book bag and wears a ski parka over his tweed jacket, has blossomed into a genuine academic superstar. He has won a MacArthur "genius" grant; his books have been translated into 20 languages; and he gives about 75 talks a year. There are now "M.I. schools" all over the country. His ideas have achieved extraordinary currency in even the most rarefied reaches of the educational world; when the directorship of one of New York's most prestigious private schools recently came open, almost every candidate for the job mentioned Gardner in his or her one-page educational-philosophy statement. In the 15 years since the publication of Gardner's *Frames of Mind*, multiple intelligences has gone from being a widely disputed theory to a rallying cry for school reformers to a cultural commonplace. And, amazingly, it has done so without ever winning over the scientific establishment.

Gardner's central claim is that what we normally think of as intelligence is merely a single aspect, or two aspects, of a much wider range of aptitudes; he has counted eight so far. Thus we have exalted the attribute measured by IQ tests—the hyperlogical style Gardner half-jokingly calls the "Alan Dershowitz" model of intelligence—and have slighted our creative and interpersonal gifts. Of course, the primary question about this theory is whether or not it's true. But an intriguing secondary question is why it's so wildly popular. "I think the whole intelligence establishment and the psychometric tradition were ready to be attacked by somebody who was credible," Gardner told me the first time I met him, in the midst of a two-day speaking tour in Chicago last December. "We know that kids who do well on tests are smart, but we also know that a lot of kids who don't do well on tests are getting it. The question is not how smart people are but in what ways people are smart." This is, of course, an immensely appealing idea. Gardner has offered an explanation for academic failure in which the problem lies in the system of measurement rather than the student or the teacher; more broadly, he has given intellectual legitimacy to critiques of the test-driven meritocracy and of the high-IQ elite it fosters. Multiple intelligence theory clearly serves many purposes. That makes it powerful, but not necessarily valid.

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Psychometrics hasn't changed much since Alfred Binet devised a test at the turn of the century to predict which French children would succeed or fail in school. The instruments we now use to test a child's "intelligence quotient" measure essentially the same aptitudes that Binet did—memory, vocabulary, spatial thinking, the ability to draw analogies and solve puzzles—because these are the aptitudes historically associated with success in school and in professional life. While psychometricians disagree about the extent to which intelligence is an inherited trait rather than a result of environment and upbringing, there is broad consensus around the idea that intelligence is a single entity that can be measured with fairly great accuracy. The various mental aptitudes are understood as aspects of a single underlying trait called *g*, for "general intelligence."

Howard Gardner has approached the subject of intelligence from an entirely different angle, one that combines scientific research and speculation with personal experience. Gardner is a polymath, with a breadth of interests unusual in his field. As a boy, he was a serious pianist and a student of composition; as a young scholar at Harvard, where he has spent his entire professional life, he worked with Nelson Goodman, the philosopher of aesthetics. In one of his first books, *The Arts and Human Development*, published in 1973, Gardner noted that the developmental model created by the great Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget applied only to "those mental processes that culminate in scientific thought, an end state that can be expressed in logical terms." Gardner looked instead at the development of the cognitive processes involved in creative work. Several of his subsequent books have explored the thought processes of great artistic figures. Gardner had also begun to study brain-damaged patients at Boston's Veterans Admini-

stration Hospital. He found that many of them had suffered devastating damage to a core intellectual function that had nevertheless left other functions intact—so that some aphasics who could barely comprehend speech could nevertheless recognize a metaphor or even tell a joke. This fit with an emerging consensus in neuroscience: namely, that the brain operates in "modular" fashion, with autonomous systems devoted to different mental acts.

Gardner built on these insights in *Frames of Mind*. Rather than accepting that intelligence tests captured intelligence, he drew up a series of criteria from a wide range of disciplines and assigned the title "intelligence" to whatever mental traits satisfied them. In order to make Gardner's final cut, an aptitude had to have been isolated, or spared, in instances of brain damage; had to furnish instances of prodigies or idiots savants; had to have a unique developmental and evolutionary history; and so on. These intelligences were almost wholly independent of one another; there was no master trait—no *g*. The seven winners were "linguistic" and "logical-mathematical"—the two already recognized by psychometricians—plus "musical," "spatial," "bodily kinesthetic," "intrapersonal," and "interpersonal." Gardner has since added an eighth, the "naturalist intelligence," which is the ability to make distinctions and to form classes among objects. "Existential intelligence" has been a candidate for several years, but Gardner has not yet admitted it to the pantheon.

Gardner failed to persuade his peers. George Miller, the esteemed psychologist credited with discovering the mechanisms by which short-term memory operates, wrote in *The New York Times Book Review* that Gardner's argument boiled down to "hunch and opinion." And Gardner's subsequent work has done very little to shift the balance of opinion. A recent issue of *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* devoted to the study of intelligence contained virtually no reference to Gardner's work. Most people who study intelligence view M.I. theory as rhetoric rather than science, and they're divided on the virtues of the rhetoric. Steven Ceci, a developmental psychologist at Cornell, praises Gardner as "a wonderful communicator" who has publicized "a much more egalitarian view of intelligence." But he points out that Gardner's approach of constructing criteria and then running candidate intelligences through them, while suggestive, provides no hard evidence—no test results, for example—that his colleagues could evaluate. Ceci adds: "The neurological data show that the brain is modular, but that does not address the issue of whether all these things are correlated or not." Track-and-field athletes, he notes, may have special gifts in one particular event, but they will score better than the average person on every event. Psychological tests show the same kind of correlations.

Gardner describes this conventional view of intelligence as Cartesian rather than Darwinian. Cartesians, he argues, see the mind in strictly rational and ahistorical terms. "The Darwinian view," he says, "is that this is a crazy-quilt group of faculties that we have here, and they've dealt with survival over hundreds of thousands of years in very different environments. Literacy only existed twenty-five hundred years ago. What does it mean to develop a whole theory of intelligence that didn't even exist three thousand years ago? Moreover, given that we now have computers that will do our rational behavior for us, it's an open question what the intelligences are going to be that are valued fifty years from now. It might be artistic; it might be pointless kinds of things." Why should we accept a definition of intelligence that "took a certain scholastic skill—what it meant to be a good bureaucrat a hundred years ago—and make that the quintessence of intelligence"?

But that is, in a way, precisely the problem with Gardner's theory. Intelligence is not a crisp concept but a term of value—indeed, the ultimate term of value. Some in Gardner's corner, like his mentor and colleague Jerome Bruner, say they wish Gardner had employed a more neutral term like "aptitude." But if Gardner hadn't used "intelligence" he wouldn't be the colossal figure he is today. Gardner does not shy away from the "political" dimension of his argument. "My claim that there are seven or eight Xs is not a value judgment," he told me. "It's my best reading of the biological and cultural data. But my decision to call them 'intelligences' is clearly picking a fight with a group that thought it, and it alone, could decide what intelligence was."

There may well be validity to Gardner's claim that core mental aptitudes are more autonomous from one another than psychometricians like to believe. But the reason psychologists don't measure the elements of "bodily kinesthetic" intelligence isn't that they doubt the elements exist—it's that they don't think the elements matter. Some societies may be structured around musical or athletic or spiritual attainments, but ours isn't. This is where Gardner's quarrel lies. Like Robert Coles, the author of *The Moral Intelligence of Children*, and Daniel Goleman, who wrote the wildly popular *Emotional Intelligence*, Gardner believes that we have submitted too much to the tyranny of logic. What he has elaborated over the years is the most scientifically credible and deeply pondered of the various assaults on the hegemony of logic. It's an extraordinary polemic, but it's still a polemic. And so the question it leaves us with is: Are we too preoccupied with cultivating the old-fashioned intellectual gifts, or are we not preoccupied enough?

The psychometric establishment was no match for *Frames of Mind* in the court of public opinion. Gardner had offered a vision of human nature that spoke eloquently to public disillusionment with the scientific, technocratic worldview. Although Gardner had almost nothing to say about the practical applications of his theory, he had provided a paradigm that opened up new vistas for the education of children. From the outset, educators passed *Frames of Mind* around like samizdat. Tom Hoerr, the headmaster of a private school in St. Louis, told me that he

bought the book soon after it was published, read it with mounting excitement, and then spent months meeting after school with his faculty to discuss it chapter by chapter. A group of teachers in Indianapolis drove 14 hours to talk with Gardner about creating a school based on his philosophy. Gardner didn't have a philosophy, and yet his reticence about the world of practice had the effect of vindicating almost any departure from the traditional curriculum or traditional pedagogy made in his name.

And so began the astonishing second life of *Frames of Mind* as a template for the transformation of the schools—a transformation much in evidence today. Open up a copy of *Education Week* and you'll see ads for conferences on the "Student at Risk" and "Restructuring Elementary Schools" and "Training for Trainers"—all with presentations on M.I. theory. One progressively minded educator recently told me, "Howard is the guru, and *Frames of Mind* is the bible." Few of the teachers and administrators I talked to were familiar with the critiques of multiple intelligence theory; what they knew was that the theory worked for them. They talked about it almost euphorically. To Dee Dickinson, an educator and consultant in Seattle, *Frames of Mind* offered a "metatheory" that tied together all the effective teaching strategies she had been promoting. "Here was a new way of looking at human capacities," she said, "and a new way of identifying people's strengths and finding effective ways of helping people use those strengths." Gardner appealed to the teachers' intuitive sense that children learn in different ways, and the teachers responded to Gardner's more explicitly political agenda of democratizing human gifts. Tom Hoerr said that what he learned from Gardner was that "working with other people, working with yourself, knowing other people, is a form of intelligence." Hoerr's own motto is: "Who you are is more important than what you know."

M.I. has now spawned a burgeoning cottage industry of consultants and manuals and videotapes. Several publishers have an entire sideline of Gardneriana, and I sent away for material from several of them. One of the items I received was *Celebrating Multiple Intelligences*, a teachers' guide written by Hoerr and his staff at the New City School, one of the most highly regarded M.I. schools. The book consists of a series of lesson plans in the various intelligences, further divided according to the students' ages. In one exercise designed to stimulate the interpersonal intelligence of students from the first through third grades, children form a circle and throw a ball of string back and forth, each time saying something complimentary about the recipient. The "learner outcome" is: "Children will focus on expressing positive comments to peers who they may or may not know well." Every exercise comes with "M.I. Extensions" designed to stimulate some other intelligence—write songs about the activity, play charades to illustrate the activity, and, above all, talk about how you felt about the activity. The sensitivity toward the variety of children's abilities is connected to a broader preoccupation with diversity. In order to "look at issues of prejudice and discrimination relating to disabilities, race, gender, and religion," the teachers devised an experiment in which "each child spent six hours a day being blindfolded, wearing ear plugs, sitting in a wheelchair, or having limited use of arms and hands." It lasted five days.

Here we come to the heart of the problem with multiple intelligences—not as theory, but as practice. M.I. theory has proved powerful not because it's true but because it chimes with the values and presuppositions of the school world and of the larger culture. When theories escape into the world, they get used in ways that their inventors could scarcely have predicted or even approved. Gardner hasn't been quite sure where his responsibility lies in such matters. He told me that he cannot be the "policeman" of the world he set into motion, though he has, increasingly, been its poster boy. Gardner has begun to speak out against some of the more extreme uses of his theory, and critics like educational historian Diane Ravitch have urged him to do more. When I showed Gardner copies of some of the exercises in *Celebrating Multiple Intelligences*, he scrutinized them carefully, frowned, and said, "The only answer I can give to this is: I would certainly not want to be in a school where a lot of time was spent doing these things."

Gardner himself is a rigorous thinker, and he now takes pains to talk about "the school virtues." He often describes himself as a "disciplinarian," by which he means that he believes in the traditional academic disciplines. The intelligences, he says, are not academic ends in themselves, but means by which legitimate academic ends may be reached. For example, if a child is not particularly strong in "logical-mathematical" intelligence, the math teacher should seek a medium in which the child feels more comfortable—language or even physical movement. In *Multiple Intelligences*, a book of practical advice published in 1993, Gardner writes, "Any concept worth teaching can be approached in at least five different ways that, roughly speaking, map onto the multiple intelligences." The model school that he sketches in the book has much in common with progressive schools generally. Students work with one another as much as with the teacher; they design and carry out long-term projects rather than completing daily assignments; they seek to master concepts rather than absorb information; they spend time in real-world environments. What's different about an M.I. school is that it observes a rigorous equality among the intelligences—no "hierarchizing" of language and logic.

Whether that's desirable or not depends in part on whether you think the schools are turning out too many Dershowitz-like whiz kids or too few. Having visited several dozen schools over the last decade or so, I would suggest the answer is clearly "too few." Maybe in Japan, or even in France, are schools producing students who are too narrow; the problem in the United States is that

students are too shallow. M.I. can, in theory, be a means of teaching deeper understanding, but it's at least as likely that it will be used in the service of a specious sense of "breadth." Chester Finn, an educational reformer and former Reagan administration official, describes M.I. pedagogy as the cognitive version of the multiculturalist view that school should offer a celebration of diversity. Harold Stevenson, a psychologist at the University of Michigan, says, "What they're trying to say is, 'You may not be able to do academic things, but you move well, or you're very good at music or spatial intelligence.'" Whatever Gardner himself intends, M.I. theory legitimizes the fad for "self-esteem," the unwillingness to make even elementary distinctions of value, the excessive regard for diversity, and the decline of diligence.

Gardner and other progressive educators are surely right that traditional pedagogy, at least as it is practiced in most schools, leads to superficial understandings and the confusion of recitation with real knowledge. Good teachers challenge their students at the deepest possible level; they understand that the mastery of facts and dates is a means to an end, not an end in itself. But it's a powerful means. And it may be better for schools to err on the side of too much of it rather than too little.

There are now hundreds of schools that claim to be based in whole or in part on M.I. pedagogy. Educational journals carry glowing accounts of schools "turned around" by M.I. A researcher working for Gardner says that she finds that trivial uses of the pedagogy are giving way to more serious ones. Gardner himself guessed that, if I were to visit 50 M.I. schools, "you'd see a lot more schools that are indistinguishable from other schools than you would schools that are Mickey Mouse"—not exactly a stirring defense. Still, he said, enough schools are using his principles wisely to demonstrate the potential power of M.I.

In the middle of this past school year, I spent a day at the Key Learning Center in Indianapolis, probably the most famous of the M.I. schools. I had expected Key to be one of those schools where kids learn everything in seven or eight ways, jumping up and down in math class and singing their way through English. In fact, the math and science classes I sat in on looked perfectly familiar. Still, M.I.'s influence was as conspicuous as the drawings of the intelligences that line the entrance corridor. Every student spends as much time on music and art as English or social studies. Students are not graded. They receive, instead, "pupil progress reports" in which their academic improvement, their level of motivation, and their "performance along the developmental continuum" are measured in terms that can't be plotted on invidious bell curves.

Peter Reynolds, a bright, mop-haired seventh-grader, was assigned to serve as my "docent." Peter talked about school in a way that I couldn't have imagined doing in seventh grade. What he liked about Key, he said, was the opportunity to "interact" with people, not only other kids, but also the adults in the school. Peter explained that every year, starting in kindergarten, students are expected to devise a project and present it to teachers and peers. In first grade, he had made a study of his pet rats and talked about how they reproduced, how they used their teeth, how they responded to different stimuli. All of the presentations were videotaped, so he had an archive of his work from the age of five.

Peter happened to be presenting his project that day. He had gone to Romania with his father and a friend, and he put a crude oak-tag map up on a stand, showed photographs of the trip, and talked about the people they had met. Most of it was pitched at the level of "it was really nice" and "it was really interesting." On the other hand, I was impressed by what Gardner would have called Peter's interpersonal intelligence. He was calm and forthright, and his classmates listened respectfully and asked questions. The whole school, in fact, had a very civilized and noncompetitive atmosphere; there was none of the waving of hands and shouting "me, me, me" that I remember from junior high. Then again, what's so terrible about a little self-aggrandizing intellectual enthusiasm at age 13?

The school did have a few semi-farcical touches. There was a "flow" room designed to foster the state of unselfconscious engagement that people attain at moments of peak creativity—a practice that rested on a theory devised by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a psychologist who works closely with Gardner. Kids were playing computer games, "Parcheesi," or "Guess Who?"—the kind of activities I'm happy to have my seven-year-old do at home but wouldn't expect to be part of a curriculum. But the Key school was not absurd in the way that educational traditionalists imagine. It was a serious-minded place, and the kids I met seemed enthusiastic and engaged. On the other hand, if they were engaged in deep understanding, I must have missed it. The eighth-grade "linguistics" class I sat in on read through a passage in *Life On The Mississippi* without getting within hailing distance of its meaning. The school's ambitions almost seemed to be elsewhere—in fostering a sense of personal maturity, in a genuine commitment to music, in making the children conscious of their own strengths.

What the Key school is arguably about is the fostering of a new kind of child and thus of a new kind of person—less linear and more "well-rounded," less competitive and more cooperative. This is a monumental ambition, but it's actually not far from Gardner's own vision. Something grandiose lurks beneath Gardner's modesty and care—that's why he insisted on using that provocative word, "intelligence." Back in Chicago, I heard him tell spellbound special-ed teachers that we are living at the edge of a paradigm shift. "This is a new definition of human beings, cognitively speaking," he said. "Socrates defined man as a rational animal; Freud defined him as an irrational animal; what M.I. theory says is that we are the animal that exhibits the eight and a half intelligences." •

Education Week, November 4, 1998

Math Council Again Mulling Its Standards

Proposal Includes More Basic Skills

By David J. Hoff

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics is proposing changes to its groundbreaking 1989 academic standards that would place a greater emphasis on teaching basic skills while reaffirming the group's belief that students need hands-on experience to help them understand mathematical facts.

Draft revisions released last week will be the subject of extended debate over the next 18 months. The goal of the 110,000-member group is to adopt the revisions formally at its annual meeting in April 2000.

As laid out in the proposal, changes in format and content address some of the criticisms from mathematicians and parents that the NCTM has focused on teaching mathematical concepts at the expense of basic skills and content.

"Kids have to understand addition and subtraction. They have to have automatic recall," Glenda T. Lappan, the council's president and a professor of mathematics at Michigan State University in East Lansing, said last week, after the group started distributing its draft on the World Wide Web.

"While they are accumulating those facts, there have to be problems on the table that lead to deeper understanding," she added.

The new document, "Standards and Principles for School Mathematics: Discussion Draft," partially addresses criticisms leveled at the current standards, but it appears unlikely to appease the severest critics.

"It's not significantly different. It's still the same philosophy," asserted William G. Quirk, a computer-software developer in New Haven, Conn., and a former college math professor. "They emphasize process skills and continue to be vague about content. NCTM just doesn't want to get specific about content."

Leaders of the math teachers' council were hailed as innovators in 1989 when the NCTM became the first subject-area group to publish, at its own initiative and expense, national content standards. When other disciplines followed, with the federal government underwriting a good portion of the ventures, those later efforts were often found wanting. The math standards generally continued to steer clear of controversy.

Then, in just the past few years, the NCTM standards, too, became a target of criticism, particularly from those who favor a more traditional approach to teaching the core curricula.

"The math wars" is how some have dubbed the debate over how to teach what most people consider to be the second-most fundamental subject behind reading. In California, for example, NCTM backers are at odds with advocates of a traditional curriculum over standards that the state school board has adopted. *(See Education Week, Jan. 14, 1998.)*

The California standards differ greatly from the NCTM's existing standards and its strategy to modify them. The state standards mention specific skills students should master, such as memorizing multiplication tables, and they emphasize repetitive problem-solving.

The NCTM, by contrast, encourages teachers to help students understand the concepts behind mathematics tasks such as multiplication by using real-world experiences to illustrate them.

A Merger of Content

The math council's proposed new standards have been in development for almost two years. The draft was written by a committee of 32 professors, curriculum directors, and teachers. Panels from professional groups—including the Mathematical Association of America and the American Statistical Association—advised the writing committees by critiquing the 1989 standards and responding to questions posed by the standards writers.

The comment period moves to a new phase now that the NCTM has published a draft of the changes it proposes. Throughout the 342-page document, also released in printed form last week, the writing committee poses specific questions of readers to gauge reaction. The comments will be used to inform the final proposal.

Nine and a half years ago, the NCTM released its standards to explain what students should learn from kindergarten through the end of high school. Two years later, the group released recommendations on how to teach those standards. In 1995, it explained how to assess student progress toward the standards.

The discussion draft merges content from each of those documents. "What we're trying to do is give teachers one document that covers the whole act of [mathematics] teaching," Ms. Lappan said.

The draft introduces six new principles that should guide teachers and reorganizes the general standards into 10 topics.

The principles call for all students to have access to high-quality math instruction which should be given by "competent and caring teachers."

The standards address geometry, statistics, reasoning, communication, and problem-solving.

They also realign the benchmarks: The new grade breakdowns are preschool-2, 3-5, 6-9, and 9-12 instead of K-4, 5-8, and 9-12.

The proposed standards are consistent throughout the four new grade spans, with content increasing in difficulty as students move through school. In the 1989 version, the standards differed across the grade spans.

In another change, the discussion draft lists standards dealing with content—such as geometry and algebra—before those covering process, such as reasoning and communication.

'Correct Answers Matter'

Throughout the document, the standards writers add specific issues teachers need to address. For example, it suggests that by the end of 5th grade, students should be able to graph fractions such as one-fourth, one-half, and five-eighths on a number line. And the section on high school geometry includes an extended discussion of the Pythagorean theorem.

"A lot of our input suggested that our document needed to be a lot more specific," said Joan Ferrini-Mundy, the chairwoman of the group that wrote the draft and the associate executive director of the center for science, math, and engineering education at the National Research Council in Washington. "There were people who wanted to provide as much food for thought as possible."

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At the same time, the draft maintains its focus on teaching children how to learn through solving real-life problems and to communicate their reasoning through pictures, graphs, and prose.

"There can be no doubt that both conceptual understanding and procedural proficiency are important," the draft says. "It is not the primacy of either that we should be considering. Instead, it is the connections between them that are important."

Such statements try to clarify an earlier emphasis on conceptual understanding that many teachers misinterpreted, Ms. Lappan and Ms. Ferrini-Mundy said.

Some went overboard in interpreting the 1989 standards to mean that the communication of problem-solving took precedence over finding the correct answer.

"Teachers shouldn't say the correct answer doesn't matter," Ms. Lappan said. "In our zeal to make sure we're focusing on understanding, we cannot forget correct answers matter."

Critics Unsatisfied

While few had read the weighty document that became available just last week, some mathematicians suggested that the changes were necessary and welcome.

"They shouldn't go too far afield from what they started in '89," said Thomas L. Moore, an associate professor of mathematics at Grinnell College in Iowa and the chairman of the group from the American Statistical Association that advised the NCTM committee. "The message people got out of the '89 standards means there's some rewriting that needs to be done."

Mr. Quirk and some other mathematicians, however, say that the council is still placing too much weight on process and not enough on basic skills. Children need to learn how to perform basic functions before they can apply them to real-world problems, these critics say.

"Doing precedes understanding," said Frank Y. Wang, the president of Saxon Publishers, a Norman, Okla., company that has bucked the trend of revising textbooks to match the NCTM standards. "You have to do, do, do before you understand."

The proposed standards also don't go far enough to appease those who object to letting young children use electronic calculators. "Students at all levels should have access to calculators and other technology to use as they solve problems," the draft says.

"There's a place for calculators," said David Klein, a professor of mathematics at California State University-Northridge. "They're very good in science labs, but to put them in an arithmetic class is obscene."

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Higher Education

We happily bring you Martin Trow's stunning comments to the annual meeting of the American Association of Universities regarding William Bowen and Derek Bok's much-discussed new book, *The Shape of the River*. Trow takes issue with their work and argues that the costs of racial preferences in higher education admissions outweigh the benefits.

Next, David Wessel's article from *The Wall Street Journal*, "Who Will Teach Johnny to Read?" focuses on remediation in higher education. Wessel argues that simply banning remedial education from college campuses is not going to make the problem go away, and that legislators should be looking at alternative solutions.

Lawmakers in Virginia may have come up with one, as chronicled in Victoria Benning's *Washington Post* article, "VA Wants Freshmen to Have a 'Warranty.'" If Old Dominion high school graduates need remediation in college, their local school districts would pay the bill. Sounds fair to us.

Finally, James Traub's *New York Times* article, "At Queens College, Shaking Up is Hard to Do," highlights the difficult work of reforming a higher education institution. Allen Sessoms, the college's president, has introduced some radical ideas—and is taking lots of heat for it.

SMF

Comments on William Bowen and Derek Bok, The Shape of the River,[1] to the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Universities
Berkeley, California, October 19, 1998

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As U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy eloquently put it in the context of the Equal Protection Clause in Miller v. Johnson, 515 U.S. 900, 91(1995), "At the heart of the Constitution's guarantee of equal protection lies the simple command that the Government must treat citizens as individuals, not as simply components of a racial, religious, sexual or national class."

Introduction

It is a happy custom in this country to introduce a talk to a meeting with a light hearted remark or even a joke. I often do that; indeed, unwisely I do it overseas, and most recently in Switzerland and Japan, where the response to my efforts reminded me of the diversity of national cultures. I have no time or heart to try that here today, except to say that there is something intrinsically humorous about being asked to comment in 15 or 20 minutes on a very dense book on a contentious subject to an audience in which no single person is likely to agree with my views.

My charge today is rather vague and open ended. I am asked to reflect on this book, surely in part because I am known as a critic of race preferences in higher education and a supporter of Proposition 209. There is no way in which I can develop a coherent statement of that position, and then examine systematically the findings of Bowen/Bok as a piece of social science.

Indeed, the book, and I think the authors would agree, is not only a piece of social science research; it is also a lawyer's brief aimed at future decisions bearing on broad policy in this area. That is of course a perfectly legitimate use of social science, especially when it is clearly recognized, as I believe in this case. But it does complicate the work of a critical reading, by which I do not include the reading by editorial writers for the NY Times, because it does not do the work of more disinterested research by making clear its assumptions, nor by drawing one's attention to negative evidence.

So in these few minutes I can do no more than draw attention to some of the unexamined assumptions on which the analysis is built, and then consider some of the unintended and often undesired consequences of the patterns of race preference which it defends. In a sense, it is an effort to assess some of the costs -- mostly non-money costs -- of these policies, which might allow us to better assess race preferences as a public policy for higher education.

My first impression on reading the book was how parochial a volume it is, how clearly it reveals it origins east of the Hudson. There are problems associated with race in America, some of them linked to the academic preparation and performance of black Americans taken as a group, which affects their distribution among our 3700 colleges and Universities. This book does not address that issue; it takes more or less as given the number of black high school graduates who are motivated and prepared for college at various levels, and then argues that elite institutions should be able to take their color into account in their admissions policies. But it slowly dawned on me that, apart from its Constitutional implications with their far-reaching consequences, this really is a tempest in a teapot. The book is elaborately concerned with the distribution of a small number of able and talented black students among a small number of very selective colleges and universities -- and by no means all of them. The students it is concerned with are all going to a college or university somewhere, almost certainly to some pretty good college or university, with or without their help, and make their contribution to society in a variety of ways that will owe more to their own talents, energies and unique qualities than it does to the particular institution which they attended. This may be heretical to presidents and former presidents of elite eastern research universities, but perhaps not so heretical on the West Coast, where we are a shade less concerned with the marginal advantage of the status attached to being a graduate of Yale or Princeton, and rather more concerned with what efforts and energies a student is putting into his studies, and with what success she is discovering where her peculiar genius lies.

Indeed, I find the book mildly embarrassing in its intense focus on the ability of a small group of elite universities to cream off a disproportionate number of academically able black students , and then to demonstrate that the students thus preferred are advantaged thereby, that they make friends with people of other races, do not resent their having been preferred, and do very well occupationally and financially after graduation. One could stipulate all of this, in lawyerly language, and not be persuaded that those benefits to a handful of preferred students do not have large and costly consequences for higher education generally and for the society as a whole. Very briefly put, my sense is that the book has less concern for the stock of well educated black people in our population, or the welfare of the

society in which those people take their place, than in their own institutional pride, and in the trophy minority students they can enroll in a fierce competition for the status attached in some circles to the numbers and percentages of students in preferred categories they can enroll. And in all of this, inevitably, whatever disclaimers they make, they must suggest that black students who do not go to their most selective institutions, or would not go under a race neutral regime, would be greatly disadvantaged thereby. They do not make that case, and I don't believe it for a second. Nowhere can they demonstrate, in their piles of survey data, that a black student who is admitted on his/her own merits to UC Riverside, or indeed to CSU San Diego, is significantly disadvantaged in relation to an affirmative action admit to Princeton or Harvard. More important, it does not persuade me that black citizens or the country are injured thereby. The notion that you have to go to one of these most selective universities to fulfill your potential, and become a leader in American life, is a survival of an elitist conception of American life that does not recognize how widely dispersed power and influence are, how diverse the origins of our institutional leaders. I accept that graduation from one of these selective institutions gives graduates advantages through their networking and their reputation as elite universities. That kind of advantage is built into the status system of the society and its universities, and minorities who are admitted to those institutions have as much right to that advantage as anybody else. But it is simply true that now and for the future the overwhelming majority of blacks in leadership positions will come from other institutions which they enter without race preferences. And the costs to blacks and to American society as a whole of the racial/ethnic preferences defended by Bowen and Bok far outweigh the marginal advantage to the small number of highly qualified black students who are assured entry to any number of first rate colleges and universities without any preferenced advantage.

But in the course of making the case that this competition for preferred students, whatever its motivations, has happy results for the recipients of preference, the book simply finesses a whole set of questions that must attach to race and ethnic preference policies when looked at from beyond the Hudson and through the perspective of a wider range of colleges and universities.

This bears on the especially contentious issue of "cascading,"[2] of what would happen if the most selective were to practice a race neutral admissions policy. I confess some difficulty in understanding the discussion of this matter in the book, despite the assurances by Ronald Dworkin.[3] What I cannot understand is how there can be any doubt that students not accepted to the most selective institutions would certainly be accepted somewhere, maybe to another slightly less selective Ivy institution, maybe to one a little less selective than that. Is there any question that they would

go somewhere? And what evidence is there that they would not fare well in such places, or make useful and even important contributions to American life?

California, and especially UC, may be useful in clarifying these questions, though I think we need more and maybe different kinds of research, not quite so dismissive of life outside the most elite research universities. We have in UC a mini-laboratory of the cascading effect. In 1997 and 1998 Prop. 209 and the Regents actions took effect throughout the University, in 1997 for graduate and professional schools, and in 1998 for undergraduates. While we do not yet have final enrollment figures for the whole University for 1998, we do have what the experts say is a good proxy, that is, the "statements of intention to register" of those who have been admitted, or SIRS.[4] If we compare the SIRS for all California Residents for all nine general campuses over those two transitional years, we find that the total number of black SIRS fell from 968 to 761, or about 20%. Of Chicanos, the biggest preferred group of all before Prop. 209, we compare 2428 in 1997 with 2406 in 1998, a decline of 22 students, that is, under 1%. There was certainly a redistribution of both groups within UC; a marked falling off of both groups at the most selective campuses, and a rise at the less selective campuses, a redistribution that left a net loss to the University of about 200 blacks and a very small net change among Chicanos, who clearly just enrolled in Irvine and Riverside and Santa Barbara when they didn't make it into Berkeley or UCLA or San Diego. I do not believe that they will have any poorer undergraduate education on the campuses they went to than they would have had in the campuses they did not get into. And they will have the enormous advantage of knowing that they are where they are on their own merits, without the preference of their race or national origins. They are not "affirmative action" admits, but just new Cal students.

As for the blacks who did not get into Berkeley or UCLA, my guess is that they had a wider choice than Chicanos. Three of the UC campuses showed an increase in black SIRs in 1998 over 1997 -- Irvine, Santa Cruz and Riverside, with little change at Davis and San Diego, so blacks were not fleeing the University, despite fearful (or hopeful?) predictions to the contrary, and indeed their "take rate" of admissions has held up throughout the University. But here I would like to see some research which might give us better data on the nature of "cascading" in different parts of the country and for different groups. While some of the blacks not admitted to Berkeley or UCLA went to other UC campuses, like the Chicanos, I suspect that others went on to quite good private universities and colleges, in California or elsewhere, which offered them attractive scholarship packages. I would be curious whether some went to one of the 22 campuses of the California State University system, itself relatively selective, taking the top one third of California's high school graduates, but which I would guess most Berkeley or

UCLA rejects would easily enter. If they did they would profit from the quality of the education one can get at those primarily teaching institutions, and discover how easily a graduate from CSU who has been a serious student can transfer to the University of California or another research university for graduate study if so inclined. In any event, we have here a natural laboratory for the study of "cascading" which might lead to more modest notions of its effects on life chances.

Some differences between public and private universities with respect to admissions

Beyond this issue of what would happen if institutions admitted race-blind, the book never really asks what groups should be preferenced. What is justified as a methodological limitation to blacks distorts even that story when other groups are omitted. Race in America, despite many who believe otherwise, is not a two body problem, but a multi-body problem, and that greatly complicates the efforts to deal with any one group as if it alone were the objects of policy. Race preference policies have broader implications, not least political ones, when the "people of color" you are admitting make up not 5 % or 6% of the entry, but 50% in the University as a whole, as in the University of California, and more than that on some of its campuses, and over 20% of our formerly preferenced groups. Proposition 209, which abolished the use of racial and ethnic criteria in California, expressly applies to public institutions, and does not touch the practices of Stanford or USC or Cal Tech or the many other private colleges and universities in California. While we can recognize that leading public and private universities have come to resemble one another more in recent decades, still public universities have a relationship of accountability to the public different from that of private universities. That means, among other things, that UC did not have the freedom to pick and choose which groups in society it would preference, even when it was allowed to use race as a criterion.

Second, even if you decide what groups are to be preferred, or have decided for you by public law or regulation, how do you know what individuals are actually members of those groups? This may not be a problem at Princeton; it is a problem at Berkeley or in UC generally. In smaller private institutions you may believe there is no problem about identifying blacks; you can just ask them, and then eyeball them, applying the same criterion of "one drop" evidenced by skin color and correlated features of hair, eyes and physiognomy used by the old racist society that we ought to have put behind us. Even that is not so easy in UC, and in many other large public universities where applicants are not interviewed, and we can't use the "one drop" criterion to check the accuracy of the claim on the application form.

Matters are further complicated when a growing number of applicants are of mixed race origins. The policy of group preferences forces impossible choices on the rapidly growing number of Americans from multi-racial backgrounds. Before racial preferences in public institutions were abolished in California, the University in effect said to applicants of mixed race: "You must choose between your father and your mother in marking the race/ethnicity box on the University's admissions form. If you choose the preferenced race in your origins you are likely to be admitted to Berkeley and get additional financial support. If you choose the other race or ethnicity, your chances of admission are simply poorer. If you choose to check the box labeled "Other" or refuse to choose at all we will treat you as if you were white, i.e., negatively preferenced." It cannot be right for any public institution to force a student whose parents are, say, Asian and Hispanic to choose between their father and mother in asserting their own ethnic identity. We hear again and again such students (and also people who are not students) resisting those pressures, and asserting with pride the dual or multiple nature of their ethnic roots. But the policy of group preferences rewards one identity and punishes the other. It is indefensible for public policy to force that choice.

To reward a check in a box is to invite fraud, especially when such action by a high school senior filling out a form seems to be a victimless crime (the person with the wrong skin color who will be excluded thereby is a very dim figure indeed.) In addition, in the University of California, again by contrast with conditions where students are selected rather than admitted by formula, there is no way such fraud could be uncovered.[5] On the campuses of the University of California, when race preferences were being applied, no efforts were ever made to verify the "truth" of a claim to a preferenced race/ethnicity. Indeed, when I asked about this, an official in an admissions office drew himself up and said somewhat angrily, "We are not in the business of enforcing Nuremberg Laws." Precisely. The Nuremberg Laws were employed by the Nazis to define exactly what fraction of "impure" blood would deprive a "non-Aryan" of citizenship, and eventually of life. In California, however different the motives and consequences, any efforts to establish the "truth" of claims to some preferenced category would a) require that the University or some other agency set forth what fraction of a blood line would qualify, and b) then define the procedures for testing those claims. In some smaller universities the names of students claiming a preferenced origin might be given to a student group on campus to informally check out. But in UC, if not in Princeton, students were and are ethnically anonymous if that is their choice. Moreover, on the slight chance that a "fraudulent" claim to a preference was uncovered, there were no penalties available or imposed for false claims to preferenced status. Indeed, penalties would have required a formal statement of the conditions of blood

and origin that would qualify for the preference, and that would get the University back to a Nuremberg dilemma. And wisely it chose not to do that.

But inevitably, as it became known that a check in a box would distinctly improve a student's chances of being admitted to Berkeley or other UC campus of first choice, without any check on the "truth" of that claim or penalty if discovered, it would be surprising if the amount of fraud did not grow as these facts became better known. Indeed, they did become known to teachers and guidance advisors in the high schools. By the nature of the case the frequency of this kind of fraud cannot be known with any accuracy, but to illustrate the form it takes, one university officer, visiting a local high school, observed a student filling out his application form and checking the box labeled "Hispanic." Oh, you're Hispanic," said the official by way of making friendly conversation. "No," came the reply, "Actually I'm Iranian, but my teacher told me to check Hispanic if I wanted to get into Berkeley." That was a rather straightforward claim to a fraudulent preference; the manipulation of Spanish surnames was more widespread. Here the confusion about what Hispanic means, whether it includes Portuguese and Brazilians and European Spaniards, was an invitation to a very broad interpretation which included the many part-Hispanics who did not have Hispanic surnames. Who is a Chicano or Hispanic, and how do you know? How much "blood" is required to qualify: both parents, one parent, one grandparent, or simple residence in a country that we call Hispanic? How about European Hispanics? How about Portuguese, who have recently successfully argued their way onto a government preference list? Stories of questionable claims to a preferenced status are known and retailed with a cynical chuckle in universities; before the change of policy in California they were leading to a general cynicism about the fairness of all the admissions procedures, and beyond that, to a sense that the whole enterprise was a racket.

These are not details, but insoluble issues in a country that has a deep reluctance to probe into ethnic/racial origins, and yet still in some places rests policy precisely on racial/ethnic origins.

Asians and Jews

One consequence of "affirmative action," largely neglected in the literature justifying racial preferences, is the exclusion of people from some groups that inevitably must accompany what is called "positive discrimination." In the East, where most of the private elite research universities are located, the excluded are mostly white, and thus gain little sympathy as the symbolic representatives of the advantaged and repressive groups in American history. And the private universities may choose to preference only blacks, and thus make those excluded not only white but apparently few in number.

In California we did not have that dubious privilege; before Proposition 209 we were required by federal law and regulation to include a variety of other racial/ethnic groups among those preferenced, and chief among them Chicanos and Hispanics. Moreover, in California those who are disadvantaged by their racial and national origins are more likely to be Asians, who outnumber whites on several UC campuses, and currently comprise over 40% (as compared with about 30% white) of the new Berkeley freshmen and about a third of the entering freshmen on all nine UC campuses.[6] These "Asians" of course include a very wide variety of backgrounds -- old and new Chinese immigrations, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese of various kinds, Filipinos, Indonesians, Koreans, East Indians, Pakistanis, and more. Of course the enormous range of diversity among them gains no recognition among supporters of "diversity." On the contrary, the preference policies in California were a way of controlling the numbers of "Asians" in UC. No one actually said that, except occasional visitors like President Clinton, who came to Sacramento in April 1995 campaigning against the ending of racial preferences then under consideration by the Board of Regents, and warned his listeners about the dangers of its possible passing. Beware, he said, "there are universities in California that could fill their entire freshman classes with nothing but Asian Americans."[7] The Yellow Peril again. We are reminded of similar concerns about the Jewish peril to elite Eastern private colleges and universities throughout the first half of this century, and the quotas to control their numbers that were only dismantled after World War II, quotas which persisted in some universities into the 1950s. Too many smart Jews then, too many smart Asians today; not enough room for anybody else.

Those racist exclusionary policies of the leading private research universities are not the proudest moments in their history, and few of their leaders would defend them today. But these same leaders have no difficulty in defending similar policies which exclude other people, with other skin color and eye configurations. Presumably the difference lies in the malign motives in the earlier racial exclusions, while the current ones are benign, at least in motive. But their consequences are remarkably similar. Students who are otherwise fully qualified for entry to a university are excluded because of their skin color or national origins. And a further irony is that some of the "Asians" who suffer this "benign" discrimination are the grandsons and daughters of people who were confined to relocation camps during World War II in another and now widely regretted expression of public racism in America. We should be beyond this now, beyond limiting the numbers of a given ethnic group because of the talents and aspirations of its members.

For all these and other reasons the race and ethnic preference policy at UC was not only intrinsically unfair, but was increasingly seen to be unfair

by faculty and students alike, occasioning growing resentment over race and ethnicity among all groups, and becoming a significant factor in dividing the academic community rather than bringing it together. The more differentiated ethnic and racial groups have become, the more transparent are the injustices and inequities of policies based on those group memberships. Public policies based on race and ethnicity have a powerful and inherent tendency to reduce people in all their variety and complexity to their membership in those categories. But higher education aims to further differentiate us, to encourage and educate our qualities of mind and character, to give more varied aspects to our individuality and to teach us to learn and nurture our unique qualities. Intelligence and creativity burst through the constraints of social origins, whether they be class, race or ethnicity; nurtured by our origins, we transcend them through a higher education in the disciplines and freedoms of scholarship and science. In our private lives we may honor and celebrate our origins and their cultures -- or we may not. People differ, and must be allowed to differ, in whether and how much they choose to find their identities in their ethnic origins -- but that is no business of public policy.

The book does not address the fundamental differences between private elite universities and the selective public universities which have quite different kinds of accountability to state and federal governments, and to the wider public. Private universities have an extraordinary autonomy in their private lives; they admit whom they please on whatever grounds they please. That is broadly accepted in this country, despite the inroads on their autonomy by OSHA and other regulatory agencies which still mostly do not intrude on their admissions policies. Public universities are in this respect quite different; state governments ordinarily have very strong views about the terms of access of their citizens to "their" universities. Even when, as in the case of UC, the state has granted a high measure of autonomy to the state university in part through a provision in the state constitution, still it requires, formally and normatively, that public universities make transparent the criteria for admission, and that these criteria be fair and be seen to be "fair." While notions of what is "fair" are contested and change, nevertheless a response by public universities to this expectation, certainly in California, is that on the whole and with exceptions, undergraduate students were not selected for entry on an individual basis, but were admitted on the basis of broad and known criteria, formulaic and categorical. It is only now, after race and ethnic preferences have been outlawed, that the University can move to selecting students through a reading of their whole file, adding other relevant considerations, but not race or ethnicity, to a decision based initially on test scores and high school grade point average. And this is a clear improvement, welcomed by everyone on all sides of the 209 debate.

On the issue of how long the preferences should stay in place, the authors are more forthcoming: simply "for the foreseeable future." There may be goals for the application of preferences; there are no goals visible for the ending of preferences. The notion suggested here is that one racial group, or more than one, must "for the foreseeable future" be set apart from the broad American assumption that individuals are judged, assessed and rewarded for their own achievements. These are big issues of policy and implementation which the book simply avoids in the course of telling us about the mostly successful careers of black students who went to a few prestigious universities and then on to successful careers.

How much preference is enough? The story of Boalt.

The authors also do not tell us how much preference they would defend, beyond defending whatever level was being applied in the institutions over the period they were discussing. How much is enough? Here some evidence from UC may be enlightening.

Before racial/ethnic preferences were abolished in the University of California in 1995 and in other state agencies in 1996 the ruling law was the Supreme Court's decision in the Bakke case of 1978, which while outlawing racial quotas permitted institutions to consider race as "one factor in admissions." But the question of how much of a factor in admissions was left uncertain.* Some institutions interpreted this as saying that "other things being equal" race could be a preference at the margin, and acted on that principle Others went much further, and gave whatever weight to race and ethnicity in admissions that they needed to achieve the racial mix they were seeking.

An example of this is the recent history of admissions to Berkeley's Law School, Boalt Hall. The figures on the numbers of minority students who would enroll in Boalt in the first year after SP 1 applied to graduate and professional schools was widely reported in the summer of 1997. It was a dramatic number --essentially zero, though one black student did appear who had previously been accepted but who delayed entry for a year. The figures for Boalt were reported before any other figures for other professional and graduate programs, and were taken as representative of the effects of SP 1 on the graduate programs in the University. They were not; when those figures were released many months later, it appeared that there had been very slight changes in the proportions of Blacks and Hispanics entering Berkeley's graduate programs apart from Boalt. When we look at the effect of Prop. 209 on new registrants in UC graduate schools (excluding the professional schools) we see that it had little or no effect. Between 1996 and 1997 -- that is, when SP 1 applied to UC's graduate schools -- "the number of African Americans increased by 2%, while the "other" and "declined to state" categories increased by 25%."* Those figures occasioned

very little comment in the press. One might have imagined that the University would want to spread the good news that the abolition of race and ethnic preferences at the graduate level was having very little negative effect on the numbers of black and Hispanic students in its graduate programs, but there were no press conferences or statements by senior administrative officers calling attention to these surprising figures, as they had in connection with the Boalt story. In this case, as in others in recent years, good news, that is news that the abolition of preferences had little or no effect on minority enrollments in some programs and on some campuses, was treated by the University and its public relations offices as bad news, whereas what looked like bad news, especially the Boalt story, was given the prominence and emphasis by the University that might have been given to good news. It was good news only in the sense that it confirmed the prior predictions of the large effects of the ending of the preferences on minority enrollments. Indeed, there was some tendency in the University to encourage even worse news to show how bad the new race blind policies were. Bowen and Bok quote a director of a black recruitment program at Berkeley as saying, "We told [prospective students] that [Boalt] is a very hostile environment and that we're not welcome here ... we weren't pushing them to come to Cal." [10]

Boalt was different from most other graduate and professional programs in one important respect: it was highly competitive for the ablest minority applicants with other leading law schools, especially those in the top research universities, but unfortunately it was almost always unsuccessful in that competition. Long before SP 1 or 209, Boalt was consistently losing all or almost all of its highly qualified minority candidates to law schools that were both more prestigious and could offer those candidates more financial support and perhaps also even more attractive positions on graduation. The fact that Boalt could not hold its best applicants against the Ivy league law schools is no criticism of Boalt; other law schools are more richly endowed, and even more prestigious, even better launching pads for highly successful careers. But in the Fall of 1997 when no minority students enrolled in Boalt's entering class, the public statements by administrators inside and outside the School pointed the finger of blame at SP 1 and 209 -- they were responsible for the loss of "diversity" at Boalt.

But the Boalt story before the end of preferences was a story of the radical application of preferences, surely beyond what was envisioned in Bakke. The degree of preference in admissions to Boalt was not "race sensitive," but heavily "race determined."[11] We can see this now because, unlike most other graduate departments and professional schools, admissions to Boalt had been organized around a formula placing applicants into one of four Ability Ranges, A through D, from the highest scores to the lowest, defined by a combination of the student's undergraduate grade point average and scores on the LSAT.[12] And that allowed us to see what actually had been done. In 1996 only 855 students were admitted to Boalt out of 4684 who applied.[13] But the proportions admitted were very different among the different ethnic and racial groups and in the different ranges.

For example, 18 applicants from the preferenced groups -- chiefly blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans -- fell into the top two Ability Ranges, and all but 1 of them were accepted. And that is true for the other two big groups, whites and Asians: almost all applicants from Range A were admitted. However, substantial differences in admission rates begin to appear among applicants from Range B (69% and 62% for Asians and Whites respectively, versus 94% for racially preferenced groups), and are very large in the lower two Ability Ranges C and D. Of the 124 Asian applicants in Range C, only 24, or 19%, were admitted; and of the 607 whites in that range, 101, or 17%, were admitted. But of the 35 members of Affirmative Action groups in that Range, 27 or fully 77% were admitted. And in the lowest Ability Range D, only 2 out of 492 Asian applicants were admitted (.4%), as compared with 100 out of 696 (14%) Affirmative Action applicants. The proportion of Whites admitted from that ability Range, 19 out of 1223, or 1.5%, was almost as low as among the Asians.

When we look at specific ethnic groups the differences are even more striking. Of applicants in Ability Range C, 10 were students of Japanese origins ; an equal number of Blacks applicants were in that same Ability Range. All 10 Black applicants in that Range were accepted, but not one of those of Japanese origins. Of the 384 Black applicants in Ability Range D, 62 were admitted. By contrast, of the 174 applicants of Chinese origins in that same Ability Range, not one was admitted to Boalt Hall.

When a university starts counting by eye shape or skin color, all notions of "how much" race preference is justifiable collapse; there are no criteria or numbers on which people can agree. And when merely being "race sensitive" is not sufficient to recruit what is thought to be the necessary number of qualified minority students to achieve a desired level of "diversity," as it was not at Boalt, then the temptation is to apply racial criteria as far as necessary to get the numbers right. The end of race preferences in UC had dramatically large effects on Boalt because of how much Boalt previously had to do to compensate for its weakness in competition with the prestigious Ivy League law schools for the most able minority applicants. When race preferences were abolished in UC, Boalt could no longer admit large numbers of poorly qualified minority students in preference to white and Asian students with higher qualifications. And those less well qualified minority students that had been admitted under the preference system could no longer mask Boalt's inability to compete successfully against Yale and Harvard and Columbia for the ablest minority

students. By contrast, the graduate programs in Arts and Letters and the sciences did not experience declines in their minority enrollments because they had not had to change their admissions criteria and practice very much after preferences were abolished.

On diversity—and its absence

Much is made in this book of the importance of diversity in a student body; of the value of exposing students to differing perspectives, values, and orientations for education. But oddly enough the AAU, along with its sisters on Dupont Circle, is the only group or body in the country which exhibits no diversity on the issue of race and ethnic preferences in higher education. I don't mean a near consensus, but rather a perfect consensus, as reflected by the signatures of every one of the members of the AAU in a full-page advertisement in the NY Times in April 1997 expressing opposition to laws like Prop. 209 prohibiting race blind policies.[14]

Even if you think that support for such policies is wrong-headed, is it not strange that no one among university leaders is wrong-headed, whereas we see people who are wrong-headed on every other disputed issue in the world. It is not as if they are reflecting a broad consensus on this issue in the country; on the contrary, every other group in the society is divided on the wisdom of using race and ethnicity for these decisions, and usually divided pretty evenly: Congress and state legislatures, judges high and low, business leaders and the press, ordinary academics in UC as throughout the country, students, and above all, the larger society and its voters. Everywhere people debate these issues among themselves -- except in the organizations of college and university leadership. No arguments there, at least that anyone can hear. It cannot be that your special knowledge of the workings of colleges and universities bring you to this perfect agreement; university teachers also have a pretty fair sense of the nature of the institutions in which they work, perhaps even as clear a one as that seen from above. But we know through two well crafted surveys, one in UC, all nine campuses, and the other a national survey of college and university teachers, both done by the Roper Center of the University of Connecticut, that a majority of academics everywhere oppose preferences, and while different wordings get different distributions, everywhere there are substantial numbers on both sides.[15] You may not have heard of the Roper Polls on attitudes toward racial and ethnic preferences among academics, or may have heard that they were biased; that is part of the problem of sustaining and legitimating a debate on these issues within the university and not just within the larger society or in the courts.

The consensus among academic leaders is itself an interesting phenomenon, and certainly can be seen as one of the byproducts of the race preference policy, indeed one of the costs of the policy, and not a negligible one. The differences on UC campuses between those who support ethnic/racial preferences and those who do not have not generated discussions and debates seeking to clarify, or to persuade, or to compromise those differences. On the contrary, university leadership has created a false illusion or myth of a broad consensus around one of those views, and the near absence of expression of the other. And this is largely because in all our institutions, and most certainly in the University of California, the professional affirmative action community is large, broad, and strongly committed to the policies of group preference. This, and the passion they bring to the issue, helps explain why the opposition, however well represented in the faculty, is nearly voiceless. On these issues administrators and their staffs are the voice of the university; reading their newsletters, campus journals, alumni magazines and the like one would never guess that there are considered grounds for opposing group preferences, and substantial opposition to them in the academic community.

Among university presidents, this peculiar consensus arises out of a mixture of principle and a keen sense of who on or around campus can make trouble for them. People opposed to preferences do not make any significant trouble for senior university officers; groups which profit from and administer preference policies can and do. In all leading colleges and universities, and most certainly in the University of California, the affirmative action community is large, broad, and strongly committed to the older policies of group preference. This, and the passion they bring to the issue, helps explain why the opposition to preferences, however well represented in the faculty, is nearly voiceless. These large affirmative action communities are led and created by senior administrators who themselves have been appointed on the understanding that they support the preference system, or at least will not oppose it.[16] I cannot think of a single senior administrator in the past two decades, either in Berkeley or in the Office of the President, who has been openly opposed to preferences in admissions; if they had been they would not have been appointed to those jobs -- and that includes appointments during the three years since race preferences have been abolished in UC. One result is a consensus on this issue among academic administrators which in no way reflects the diversity of views among the faculty or students.

One further result of this pattern of recruitment and retention of senior administrative staff is that university presidents do not commonly talk about admissions policies with people who oppose the preference system. The people they talk to -- their own administrative staffs and senior academic administrators, -- share their views or keep quiet, as do most academics. One aspect of academic life which no one is inclined to discuss openly is the quiet intimidation of dissenters on this issue. Very few academics wish to offend both the senior administrators who govern their

careers and budgets, and the well organized affirmative action pressure groups who are not slow to stereotype faculty members as racists, or at very least, right-wingers.

The second pillar of affirmative action is patronage, the jobs associated with the development and implementation of affirmative action policies. And jobs are the source of interests, linked in this area no differently than are jobs and interests in other areas of life. The third pillar of affirmative action, the passion that lies behind the defense of race and ethnic preferences, has two components: interest is one, but equally important are the feelings of moral superiority that attach to the doctrine of affirmative action, a moral superiority that justifies demonizing those who do not share those views. The combination of material interest and the claims to moral superiority makes for a passion that is often intolerant and denies dissenters a voice. While our colleges and universities proclaim their endorsement of diversity, the cultures of many of them simply do not permit open dissent on this issue of the nature and desirability of affirmative action. A distinguished federal judge who knows academia well has recently observed that "....groups holding considerable power in the university loathe speech with the wrong content about topics important to them, and .... those who say the wrong things will have little peer or institutional protection.... [M]any ideas may not be expressed, many subjects may not be discussed, and any discussion on matters of political salience has to avoid defending groups powerful in the university."[17] Why are these issues not discussed and debated more widely on American college and university campuses? How is it that there has been no strong challenge to the affirmative action community, its assumptions and its dominance, though we know that a majority of academics everywhere do not share those views, and make their own known only in the anonymity of opinion polls and mail ballots?

In the disputes over affirmative action in the University of California that question presented itself as a peculiar contrast between the asserted consensus within our Academic Senate in opposition to the policies of the Regents' decision to abolish group preferences, and the sharply divided sentiments of the academics themselves under the cover of anonymity. Put differently, how is it that open meetings of campus Senates on all nine campuses can have passed resolutions by lop-sided votes condemning the Regents' actions, while mail ballots at UC San Diego, Los Angeles and Santa Barbara and a system-wide survey by the Roper Center based at the University of Connecticut showed the UC faculty pretty evenly divided on the issues?[18] There are several reasons. For one thing, the University of California, like other colleges and universities, recruits scholars and teachers, not fearless Green Berets. This university, like others over the years, developed a strong climate and organizational structure in support of a policy of racial and ethnic preferences in admissions[19]: from the President's

Office down, every campus, every college had administrative offices and Academic Senate committees to plan and enforce preferential policies; every department had and has an "affirmative action" officer to monitor its behavior. All the chancellors, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, have supported the policies of group preference, as also the provosts and deans on every campus, who almost certainly would not have become provosts and deans unless they did. Indeed, for many years no chancellor, no provost or dean was appointed in the University of California who shared the views of the current majority of Regents on racial preferences. But there was and is no equivalent organization of people and energy inside the University devoted to criticizing the preference policies, or trying to reform them. Even professors with tenure do not like to run afoul of their deans and provosts, much less their chancellors, all of whom can on occasion be very clear about their own preferences, though not always on paper. I must confess that if I were still Director of Berkeley's Center for Studies in Higher Education I might not be writing in this way. I wonder if senior administrators anywhere have any idea of the chilling effect on dissent of their strong commitments on these issues, commitments which give voice to only one side of the issue?

In addition, and apart from the weight of this "affirmative action" community and its real power in the University, there is always the danger for critics of racial and ethnic preferences of calling down on themselves the charge of "racist." No matter how unwarranted and unfair, it is an awful epithet, and can damage or destroy one's relations with one's colleagues and students -- indeed, one's whole life and career. Can anyone be surprised if most University of California faculty members who did not share the official doctrines on admissions and appointments have preferred to keep their views to themselves, at least until they had the protection of anonymity in a survey being conducted from Connecticut or a mail ballot?[20]

We are talking about what might be called "consensual coercion," a pattern of attitude and action that removes the protection of legitimacy from some sets of views and policies, and sets them apart as no longer meriting that protection. The process is progressive: first is stereotyping those who hold differing views, as in labeling them "highly partisan" or right-wingers or unwitting racists; the enormous advantage of that part of the process is that you no longer have to listen or read or attend to what those others have to say; you know what they have to say, and it can be dismissed. The next step is to discredit the opponent, attacking their authority to say what they do. The next step is to demonize those others; they are no longer mistaken, but evil, and that leads to late night calls and hate mail.

This kind of coercion need not go that far to be effective; that is the meaning of the term of art in constitutional law when jurists and others speak of the "chilling effect" of some practice or policy. You may not have

noticed that the consensus on this issue, not only among university presidents but also among their senior staffs, has something of a chilling effect on debate within the university. You must ask yourselves whether you often or ever speak seriously with people in your own universities who differ with you on this important issue on which the rest of society is divided, and take seriously what they say. Aside from all the other unhappy effects on the constraints on freedom of speech, this one also has negative consequences for the wisdom of policy, and for the effectiveness of implementation.

Gains of a race-blind policy in California

In some important respects the passage of SP 1 and Proposition 209 are slowly liberating the intellectual communities on UC campuses from these chilling effects. While I believe that the President and chancellors and their senior staffs have not changed their views of the wisdom of race and ethnic preferences, it is now possible, indeed even necessary for people in this university to talk about how to admit students in ways that might preserve and enhance the diversity among them of various kinds without specific attention to their skin color or eye shape. And oddly enough, the affirmative action communities that I spoke of have not only survived, but are probably more central than they were, though now with a somewhat different charge: to find alternatives to race as supplementary criteria to academic aptitude and performance for admission. And Proposition 209 together with the Regents' actions have forced at least two important reforms on the University, reforms I do not believe would have occurred without the change of policy on race and ethnicity. First, it has forced the university to abandon its categorical formulas, and move from admitting students to selecting them by inspection of folders rather than simply of scores and race. Some students have always been "selected" on the basis of their individual qualities and promise -- musicians, athletes, students from abroad - but now this must be done more broadly. To actually make a decision about an individual on the basis of that person's own qualities and not of their group membership is an important step forward.

To support race blind or race neutral policies does not mean that one does not take into account the actual nature of American society and its effects on academic performance and life chances. For example, our admissions officers will in the course of looking at folders be able to take into account not skin color but an individual's response to disadvantaged circumstances -- as for example, performing well and taking college preparatory courses in a school where few go on to college. That kind of initiative and motivation bodes well for that student for the future, and we should encourage and reward it. Similarly, it seems to me sensible to take into account the handicaps on academic performance implicit in growing up in a household where English is the second language. But that is a characteristic of an individual and her situation, and not of an ethnic group, many members of whom come from homes in no way disadvantaged. These suggestions, which are the kinds of ideas that committees and admissions officers in UC are currently struggling with, now always direct our attention to individual qualities, and do not assume the homogeneity of race and ethnic categories -- do not therefore negatively stereotype nor throw into question the personal qualifications of the student admitted.

Another one of the clear gains of 209 is that all students admitted to UC now can justifiably feel that they are here on their own individual merits, and are not "affirmative action" admits. The problem for members of groups who are preferenced is that no one can be sure whether they are there on their own merits, or have been admitted in response to a university policy concerned with competitive numbers. Equally troubling, neither can their family or friends or classmates. The book asserts from its survey that recipients of these preferences did not resent those privileges. I suspect the authors looking at social science writing on some other issue would themselves doubt the capacity of a survey to adequately assess the deep and inevitable ambivalence of recipients of these privileges. That requires different research methodologies indeed; apart from participant observation, only long intensive interviewing might uncover the complex feelings that the authors of this book dismiss in so cavalier a way.

I have mentioned two clear gains from the passage of 209: one is the removal of personal doubts --one might say inner stigma -- about whether one is there on one's own merits; a second is the reform of the University's admissions procedures to focus on individuals. The third, perhaps most important, is the stimulus provided by 209 to attack the basic problem of minority underrepresentation in higher education where universities might actually have some effect, that is, on the quality of instruction in the schools. The University of California has begun to do that in a serious way, with the help of a recent grant of $40 million from the California Legislature. Each campus has a chance and challenge to develop a program for aiding the quality of K-12 schooling in the state. That is exactly where our energies ought to be going, to improve the quality of education for all California youth, and inevitably in the course of that helping most those who most need help, who are disproportionately but not exclusively black and Hispanic. The aim is not the distribution of a small minority of qualified blacks among a very small number of elite universities, but the increase of the whole population of qualified youth, among them many more black and Hispanic youth, prepared and motivated to continue their education in the best institutions that they aspire to and that will accept them for what they are and not for their skin color or national origin. Race and ethnic preferences simply distract us from that overriding obligation.

[1] William G. Bowen and Derek Bok, The Shape of the River, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998.

[2] "Cascading" refers to the pattern of choices made by students who are refused entry to very highly selective institutions who are then admitted to somewhat less selective institutions. But in California we are also seeing "cascading" upwards, from UC campuses without race preferences to more selective private colleges and universities which offer race and ethnic preferences.

[3] In the New York Review, November 5, 1998, pp. 56-60.

[4] University of California Application, Admissions and Enrollment of California Resident Freshmen for Fall 1998, 1997, and 1996, Office of the President, Student Academic Services, Fall 1998.

[5] On problems of fraudulent claims to preferred status outside of higher education, see "Now tell the truth, are you minority?" by Tom Brune, Seattle Times staff reporter, at see http://www.seattletimes.com/news/local/html98/race_052698.html

[6] University of California Application, Admissions and Enrollment ....op. cit.

[7] Quoted by Leo Rennert, Washington Bee Bureau Chief, under the headline "President Embraces Minority Programs, "The Sacramento Bee, (Metro Final). April 7, 1995, p. A1. One might have imagined that the University would protest publicly that there was no such danger, and moreover that that kind of overt racism was not welcomed by the University. But there was no response by the University, whose leadership and offices of public relations were inclined to overlook remarks that were at least on the right side of the controversy.

[8] See Allan P. Sindler, Bakke, DeFunis and Minority Admissions, New York, Longman, 1978.

[9] University of California Graduate School Applicants, Admits and New Registrants by Race/Ethnicity. Fall 1995 through Fall 1997 Classes, Office of the President, University of California, January 9, 1998.

[10] The Shape of the River, p.38.

[11] These data were obtained by Mr. Dan Guhr, a graduate student at Oxford University doing his dissertation on comparative patterns of access to higher education in several advanced societies. We want to thank the Office of Admissions at Boalt Hall for making these data available to us.

[12] For example, the chart for California residents defines Range A as including stepped combinations of GPAs from 4.00 to 3.80 and LSATs from 167 to 178. So a GPA of 4.00 and LSATs of 167 to 171 are included, as are a GPA of 3.80 and a LSAT score of 178.

[13] In both 1996 and 1997 fewer than 1 applicant out of every 5 were admitted by Boalt, (18.2% in 1996 and 19.9% in 1997).

[14] The New York Times, 24 April, 1997. The consensus is so strong that for the chancellors of the UC campuses in the AAU it overrode the clearly stated policy of the University of California on this issue, as determined by its governing body, the Board of Regents. But in those cases, it was not clear who the chancellors who signed the advertisement in the names of their campuses were speaking for.

[15] See below, fn. 18.

[16] These "affirmative action" communities have survived the abolition of race and ethnic preferences in UC. They survive to deal with the more challenging task of finding ways to increase diversity of all kinds in the University that do not violate the law prohibiting race preferences.

[17] A.J. Kleinfeld, "Politicization: From the Law Schools to the Courts," Academic Questions, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Winter 1993-94), p.17.

[18] The Roper Poll of UC faculty on all nine campuses was designed in consultation with members of the UC faculty, including the writer, and had a response rate of 80%. It survived searching criticism on methodological grounds. Very briefly, the Roper Poll asked voting members of the Academic Senate whether they favored granting preferences to women and certain racial and ethnic groups, or whether they favored promoting equal opportunities in these areas without regard to an individual's race, sex, or ethnicity. A wide plurality (48 percent) favored the latter policy; only 31 percent favored the granting of race and ethnic preferences. These findings are consistent with polls on this issue over the past twenty years, both among academics and in the general population. When the question was put differently, in the form "Do you favor or oppose using race, religion, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin as a criterion for admission to the University of California," the findings show a bare majority (52%) for retaining those as "criteria," and fell below 50% when asked about these preferences for appointments to the faculty. When asked in yet another question about their own understanding of the term "affirmative action," given the choice between "granting preferences to women and certain racial and ethnic groups," or "promoting equal opportunities for all individuals without regard to their race, sex, or ethnicity," the faculty sample voted for the second definition over the first, by 43% to 37%. Another 15% accepted neither statement as their own meaning of the term. Indeed, one might note that over the years supporters of race and ethnic preferences have highjacked the term "affirmative action" to refer to their policies, contrary to the views of a plurality of UC faculty who still think it means "promoting equal opportunities." For a full report on this survey, see The Roper Center Survey of Faculty Opinion about Affirmative Action at The University of

California, October 1996, sponsored by the California Association of Scholars, at http://www.calscholars.org/roper.html
The Roper Center also conducted a similar survey in October 1996 of academics in colleges and universities all over the country. This found even higher proportions of respondents opposed to race/ethnic preferences in admissions and appointments than was found in the UC survey. See http://www.nas.org/roper/exsum.htm
See also "UC Faculty have mixed feelings on admissions. About half support special criteria, favor equal opportunity." Rachanee Srisavasdi, Daily Bruin, Jan. 30, 1996, at http://www.dailybruin,ucla.edu/DB/Issues/96/1.30/n

[19] And also in respect to appointments, both academic and staff. This paper does not discuss the rather different issues involved in staff and academic appointments.

[20] Twenty-five years ago Professor John Searle, reflecting on the campus wars of the '60s, commented on the behavior of the Academic Senate and its meetings in a penetrating analysis of those events. His remarks may help us understand the wide discrepancy between the public votes of poorly attended Senate meetings, and the votes on exactly the same issues on mail ballots cast anonymously:

"The striking thing [about faculty meetings around contentious issues] is the extent to which a small group of really determined left-wing faculty who know exactly what they want and are prepared to seize the rhetorical initiative and fight for what they want, can exert an influence wildly disproportionate either to their own numbers or the size of their constituency in the faculty. The moderates not only tend to be unclear and indecisive about what they want, but they are also anxious to avoid a fight. They don't like being in adversary relationships, and they would like to keep peace in the faculty family as long as they can. At these meetings everyone is anxious to avoid a 'divided faculty'." John Searle, The Campus War, New York: the World Publishing Company, 1971, pp. 147-148.

The Outlook

Who Will Teach Johnny to Read?

WASHINGTON

About 30% of first-time college students take remedial courses because they can't read, write or do math adequately. At community colleges, the percentage is often much higher—and it's rising.

Is this a problem? Or is it a solution?

A vocal band of politicians and college trustees see it only as a problem. Florida's legislature now requires students who flunk a remedial course to pay triple the normal tuition the second time. "Surely the taxpayers shouldn't pay for you to take" a remedial course again, says legislator Robert Shindler.

Elsewhere, legislators talk of charging high schools the cost of teaching their graduates the basics. A few congressmen fret about giving financial aid to students who are learning to read in college.

Early this year, New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani stirred controversy by proposing that the City University of New York get out of the remedial business. CUNY trustees voted to end remedial classes at four-year colleges but permit them at two-year community colleges, where more than 80% of incoming students need remedial help. At community colleges elsewhere in New York, the proportion is about 47%.

In Georgia, where 20% of state university freshmen take remedial courses, the Board of Regents has voted to eliminate the classes by 2001 (except for students who have been out of high school five years or more). Trustees of the California State University system vow to cut the proportion of such students to 10% by 2007 from nearly 50% now.

Restricting remedial classes in colleges is billed as a way to force high schools to do their jobs and to avoid dumbing-down college curricula. "I think we should change the standards at the high-school level so we give the kids a real high-school diploma," says Herman Badillo, the former Bronx president and a CUNY trustee.

To many educators and economists, however, this is like telling emergency rooms that the best way to encourage use of seat belts is to turn away injured passengers who weren't wearing them. It might help, but does it make sense?

Indeed, the fact that more than two million people are taking remedial courses on college campuses could be seen as a hopeful sign. Yes, it would be far better if those students had learned the basics in high school. But they didn't. And if colleges can teach them to read, write and add, two million more people will have a shot at decent jobs, with the obvious benefits to themselves and society.

"These people exist. They aren't going to go away," says economist David Brenneman, dean of the University of Virginia's education school. If colleges turn them away, they "are either going to be in very low-paying jobs, on welfare or imposing costs on society in some other way."

Muscle doesn't pay well anymore. According to new skill standards crafted by construction firms and unions, even pipelayers need to understand how to calculate rates of slope per foot and the volume of cylinders. A National Association of Manufacturers survey finds nearly 70% of its members offer remedial courses themselves, clear evidence that there is an economic payoff.

If the benefits of remedial education are often undervalued, the costs are often overstated. Half the entering freshmen at Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville, Fla., need remedial work, but the cost is less than 3% of the budget. Mr. Brenneman estimates that public colleges spend perhaps 1% of total revenue on remedial education, at most $2 billion. Americans spend three times that sum on cut flowers.

The public debate isn't usually framed as an argument over costs and benefits; instead, it's about the contentious issue of standards. But if colleges raise standards for entry into degree-granting programs, the need for remedial courses to help students meet those standards won't shrink; it will grow.

So the question becomes not whether remedial courses should be taught, but where. Increasingly, the answer is: community colleges. Although they would rather boast of other accomplishments, community colleges do lots of remedial teaching, and many do it well. In Florida, state universities are forbidden from offering remedial courses; they contract with community colleges to teach the courses on every university campus. California statutes deem remedial instruction an "essential and important" community-college function.

"The issue isn't as easy as it appears on the surface," says Charlene Nunley, executive vice president of Maryland's largest community college, Montgomery College. Not so long ago, fewer than half of high-school students aspired to college; now 70% or more do. "Much broader ranges of students have to be prepared for college," she says.

To reduce the need for remedial courses, a few farsighted colleges are moving beyond hectoring high schools to helping them. The Georgia Board of Regents has raised $8 million in corporate money for after-school, Saturday and summer programs for seventh- and eighth-graders who might otherwise need the remedial help that the university won't be offering when they reach college age. Montgomery College learned from focus groups with its own remedial students that many turned away from academics in 10th grade. So in a pilot program, the college now administers a version of its placement test to 10th-graders so they know what it takes to succeed in college, and dispatches community-college remedial specialists to help high-school teachers.

These programs won't show immediate results. But they are more likely to succeed than simply trying to ban remedial education from college campuses.

— DAVID WESSEL

The Wall Street Journal, November 9, 1998

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The Washington Post, November 23, 1998

Va. Wants Freshmen To Have a 'Warranty'

College Remediation a Concern

By Victoria Benning
Washington Post Staff Writer

Local school systems in Virginia would issue a "warranty" on their high school graduates and promise to pay the cost of remedial classes that the students had to take as college freshmen, under a plan being developed by state higher education officials.

The proposal reflects state officials' growing frustration at the large numbers of college students who are having to learn basic skills they should have mastered in high school. One-fourth of Virginia public high school graduates at the state's public colleges take at least one remedial class in reading, writing or math during their freshman year.

The remedial courses are costing about $40 million a year, state officials estimate—roughly $15 million of it borne by the college students and their parents and the rest covered by state taxpayers.

Shifting those costs to local school districts would create a powerful incentive to do a better job of preparing students for college-level work, advocates of the warranty plan say.

"This is rather a rifle shot . . . to raise the profile of the issue and to communicate to the K-12 institutions that they have responsibility for the outcome of their students," said William B. Allen, executive director of the State Council of Higher Education, which is preparing the proposal.

But many local school officials are wary of the idea, saying the high enrollment in remedial courses is partly because more students are attending college. If colleges don't want to provide such classes, they need to be more selective in their admissions, local educators say.

Across the country, the issue of college remedial classes is stirring debate, with educators and politicians viewing the courses as an acute symptom of lax academic standards. College officials complain of being forced to dumb down their curriculum, and they worry that too few of their students are taking the rigorous courses they will need to be successful in their careers.

Some states, such as Colorado, Georgia and South Carolina, have eliminated remedial courses at four-year colleges. Other states are putting limits on funding of the courses or are capping enrollment.

So far, no state has adopted a plan to charge local school systems for the cost of the classes, although there have been proposals to do so in several states, including Texas, New Jersey and Montana.

In Maryland, where the statistics on remedial-course enrollment are similar to Virginia's, officials are trying to improve coordination between high school and college curriculums.

Members of Virginia's higher education council have asked their staff to present a warranty plan by January. An early draft of the proposal recommends that the warranty initially cover students who graduate from high school with an advanced studies diploma and a grade-point average of at least 2.5.

Rather than mandate the warranty program, which would require action by the state legislature, council officials say they envision persuading a few school districts to offer the guarantee voluntarily. At that point, public pressure would force more districts to join the program, state officials believe.

"Who is going to want to be the district to stand up and say, 'We don't guarantee our graduates,' " Allen said.

Local school officials agree they need to do a better job with their students, but they say it is unfair to hold them totally responsible for their graduates' problems in college—especially when standards can vary greatly from one state college to another.

"Our job is to do everything we can to ensure our students meet a certain standard when they graduate," said Pam Gauch, associate superintendent for instruction in Prince William County. "To hold us responsible afterward, based on a college's standards, well, I'm not sure that's a good idea."

The warranty plan is a simplistic answer to a complex problem, local officials say. They argue that many students who are taking college

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remedial courses probably would not have been admitted to college a few years ago. They also note that some students don't decide they're interested in college until late in their high school careers, and thus graduate without having taken college preparatory courses.

But supporters of a graduate-guarantee program say the effect of holding school districts financially accountable should not be underestimated.

"A school superintendent who has to go before a school board or board of supervisors to ask for more money to pay for instruction that students should already have had is going to have to answer some tough questions," said consultant David Wheat, who conducted a study of remedial education in Virginia on behalf of the Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy.

According to the Virginia higher education council, 85 percent of the state's college freshmen taking remedial courses are enrolled in community colleges, and most of the rest attend Norfolk State University, Virginia Commonwealth University or Clinch Valley College. But Wheat said he became aware of "thinly veiled" remedial courses on other major campuses in the state while conducting his study.

The warranty proposal grew out of a meeting at which both the higher education council and the Virginia Board of Education heard officials from Hanover County describe how such a program has worked in their school system.

Hanover, which launched its program in 1994, is the only school district in the state with a warranty plan. Every Hanover student who graduates with at least a 2.0 grade-point average comes with a two-year warranty. If a Hanover graduate, during his first two years in college, needs remedial work before enrolling in a required academic class, the school district will foot the bill for the remedial course.

So far, the district has paid out 14 claims, averaging about $400 apiece, Hanover officials say.

Hanover graduates who go to work right after high school are guaranteed, too. An employer who finds a graduate lacking in a basic skill can send him back to the school system for extra classes, at the district's expense.

"We think it says something for a school division to stick its neck out there.... We're putting our money where our product is," said Bill Sadler, director of alternative education for the district, about 10 miles north of Richmond.

The concept is a good one in theory, but it would be hard to implement in a diverse school system in which student learning is influenced by many factors over which teachers have no control, said Fairfax County School Superintendent Daniel A. Domenech.

"It's a great idea, but I'm not sure it would be practical in a district like Fairfax," Domenech said, pointing out that the county has large numbers of students arriving from other countries, often late in their academic careers.

Domenech noted that Fairfax is instituting several policies that have the same purpose as the warranty proposal, including adopting high school graduation standards that are higher than the state's.

State officials agree that a warranty program is only one piece of a multifaceted approach to cutting the remediation rate. And to show that they are not singling out high schools, they have proposed that the state's teacher colleges issue similar guarantees for their graduates who go on to teach in public schools.

The warranty plan fits in well with the state's overall focus on raising academic standards for public school students, said Board of Education President Kirk T. Schroder.

"There is a genuine concern that we not let kids pass through the public education system without having attained a core level of knowledge," Schroder said. "This is another way of ensuring that."

The New York Times, November 1, 1998

At Queens College, Shaking Up Is Hard to Do

LAST SUMMER, ALLEN L. SESSOMS, the president of Queens College, came up with the kind of radical, out-of-the-box proposal you don't often hear from officials at the City University of New York: a merger between his college and nearby Queensborough Community College to form the University of Queens, a new entity with remedial students at the bottom and doctoral candidates at the top.

The plan got a remarkably frosty reception. The chairman of CUNY's board of trustees, Anne A. Paolucci, whom Gov. George E. Pataki had installed to lead a wave of reform, dismissed the idea as a distraction.

Mr. Sessoms's own faculty members were, and remain, somewhere between skeptical and hostile. A high-ranking CUNY official calls him a hot dog; a social scientist at Queens refers to him as an opportunist.

In a way, Mr. Sessoms is a symbol of the changes being thrust upon the CUNY colleges from the outside: from Governor Pataki, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and members of the board of trustees, who have been demanding that the system raise its academic standards, even at the cost of its historic commitment to open admissions. Mr. Sessoms is the rare insider who identifies with these external forces of change; he has come up with one initiative after another designed to raise Queens's profile and distinguish it from the other CUNY colleges. The system has reacted to him as if he were a foreign body in its midst.

"The problem with people at CUNY is they're very passive," says Herman Badillo, a board member appointed by Mayor Giuliani and a strong supporter of Mr. Sessoms's. "They like to maintain the status quo."

In background, Mr. Sessoms is not part of the system; his sense of what is right and normal comes from elsewhere. A graduate of Union College, he earned a Ph.D. in physics from Yale in 1971, taught at Harvard for seven years and then joined the State Department, where he negotiated nuclear nonproliferation agreements in Iran, Iraq and the Soviet Union. Thereafter, he served as a diplomat in Paris and Mexico City. Mr. Sessoms, who is married to an economist and has two children, then spent two years as academic vice president at the University of Massachusetts before being hired at Queens in 1995.

Mr. Sessoms talks about the open admissions ideal like someone who has just flown in from Paris. "If you want to go to the Sorbonne, and your French isn't good enough, you go to the Alliance Française," he said last month in a conversation in his office, overlooking the campus. "If you can't, tough; there are no excuses. I don't see the point in making the case that people should be permitted to do things they're incapable of doing. It doesn't help them, it doesn't help the institution, and we can't afford it."

That sits pretty flat on the toothbrush, all right. Words like "incapable" are taboo inside CUNY; people who use them are branded reactionary, elitist or even — the ultimate weapon — racist. But Mr. Sessoms has one incalculable advantage over CUNY's usual critics: he is black, and he was raised, as he often reminds visitors, in the South Bronx. His father ran a bodega, and his mother was a nurse. He is a product of the bygone, pre-open-admissions era of no excuses.

"If you were misbehaving in school," he recalled, "your parents knew about it before you got home. The teacher was someone to be respected, and if there was a problem in the school, it was the kid's fault."

Mr. Sessoms graduated from Theodore Roosevelt High School, where, he says, only "dummies" failed to graduate with a Regents diploma signifying a college-preparatory course of study. When he gave the commencement address at Roosevelt in 1996, he says, he was told proudly that 114 students were graduating — in a school of 4,000 students. Barely a dozen had Regents degrees.

"The problem," Mr. Sessoms says, "lies not with the teachers and administrators, but with the larger social unwillingness to demand achievement and to stigmatize failure" — an unwillingness, he believes, CUNY has perpetuated.

Mr. Sessoms, 52, is a brisk and self-confident figure with the strong handshake and solid upper body of the track athlete he was in high school and college. He is the kind of person who professes bafflement that others cannot see what is perfectly obvious to him. He has only good things to say about Governor Pataki, and he seems to view New York's famously combative mayor, widely despised inside CUNY, as something of a role model. "Rudy Giuliani has demonstrated that he doesn't have to be loved," Mr. Sessoms says. "He only has to be successful."

Mr. Sessoms has some of the Mayor's penchant for the harsh truth. "The only thing that matters in public policy documents is the budget line," he says. Over the last 20 years, CUNY has suffered devastating budget cuts that have reduced the number of full-time faculty by more than half. When Mr. Sessoms arrived at Queens, it was facing a new round of reductions, and the faculty was hoping that the new president would use his prestige to defend the system and demand a restoration of funds as a moral right.

But Mr. Sessoms views the language of moral rights as a self-defeating indulgence. The taxpayers were sending CUNY a message, he concluded, and the message was, "It doesn't work; it's been dead for 15 years." It was time, he argued, to listen to the taxpayers.

In fact, Queens College is not one of the schools that has given open admissions a bad name in some quarters. Along with Hunter and Baruch, it is generally considered one of the best of CUNY's 11 senior colleges. The campus was originally a home for wayward boys, and Mr. Sessoms's 12th-floor office looks out on a grassy commons surrounded by several quaint, Mission-style stucco buildings. The college draws on the immigrant population in Queens, as well as on middle class students in Nassau County. Almost two-thirds of the 13,000 undergraduates are white, and one-third are Jewish; there are twice as many Asian students as blacks. By contrast, among the 200,000 students at CUNY, 33 percent are black, 29 percent white, 26 percent Hispanic and 12 percent Asian. The controversies that roil the system have only occasionally touched Queens. The campus is not a hotbed of anything, save study.

Mr. Sessoms says he found Queens to

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be a good college missing the opportunity to be great. One of his first initiatives was to raise the bar of admission above the CUNY minimum mandated for the senior colleges: he made the S.A.T.'s mandatory, raised the required grade-point average from the low 80's to 85 and steadily increased the minimum number of high school academic credits required to 16 from 10. Many members of the Queens faculty thought that Mr. Sessoms was taking on a nonexistent issue.

"Admissions standards are not the problem," says Barbara Bowen, an associate professor of English and the head of the college's chapter of the faculty and staff union. "The problem is underfunding."

Inside CUNY, selectivity is almost always seen negatively, as the kinder face of exclusionism. "If you drastically raise standards there may be a rather severe decline in the number of minorities who graduate," says Dean Savage, an economist at Queens. In fact, Queens's freshman enrollment fell sharply after the first year of the new standards, though the numbers have since started to creep back. Mr. Sessoms is proud of the fact that applications increased 10 percent last year, despite the more stringent requirements. In a guide to be published early next year by the Stanley Kaplan organization, Queens was rated one of the most attractive institutions for African-American students nationwide. "We're starting," he says, "to look like a normal place."

Earlier this year, after relentless prodding from the Mayor, CUNY's board passed a plan that would phase out all remediation from the senior colleges over three years, and eliminate it immediately at Queens, Hunter, Baruch and Brooklyn. (The ruling has been stalled by a court injunction.) Mr. Sessoms is one of the few college presidents to have openly embraced the board's plan, even though about half of entering students at Queens now fail one of the assessment tests that determine remedial placement. Mr. Sessoms says he feels confident that intensive tutoring would allow almost all of these students to survive in regular courses. But at a campus like City College, where students arrive with far more serious academic problems, the casualty rate would surely be much higher. Mr. Sessoms shrugs. "They go there and they get completely blown out," he says, "or they get their grades inflated, so they're completely misled. Who have you helped?"

U of Q, as they call Mr. Sessoms's proposal on campus, was designed in part to solve the problem of admissions standards. Since the community colleges would still be permitted to offer remedial courses under the board's plan, Mr. Sessoms would be able to offload his remedial students onto the lower rungs of the new university with no loss of enrollment or, therefore, of state revenue. He would thus raise standards without sacrificing access. The key element of the plan, though, is that the university would also offer doctoral degrees, which the colleges are currently prohibited from doing by state law. Many professors at Queens, especially in the sciences, are already doing doctoral research on campus, but their degrees are awarded by the Graduate Center, a CUNY-wide body located in Manhattan.

Mr. Sessoms insists that the proposal has a good chance of gaining the approval of both the CUNY board and the state legislature, but it would be no tribute to his sense of hard-headed realism if he actually believed that. In a recent presentation to the board, he put the cost of creating the university at $26 million. Since Queens's current budget is $68 million, that's a lot of money at a time of retrenchment.

Mr. Sessoms argues that the U of Q would be eligible for the great pots of Federal money that go to sustain doctoral research, thus helping solve Queens's perpetual money problems. But the individual colleges already receive millions in Federal grants; Frances Degen Horowitz, the president of the Graduate Center, says that Queens lags far behind schools like City or Hunter because its faculty is simply not competitive.

"Since the placement of doctoral students is heavily dependent on the reputation of your faculty," Ms. Horowitz tartly notes, "the new university could not possibly serve its students as well as the Graduate Center does.

"For people who don't know a lot about higher education," she adds, "these" — here she pauses to insert an off-the-record adjective — "representations sound very impressive; when you dig behind them, the facts don't support it."

Many faculty members complain that the idea was sprung on them. "The University of Queens is exemplary of an approach that has caused a lot of problems," Ms. Bowen says. "Sessoms has shown disregard for the academic structure of decision-making."

But the U of Q is certainly not dead. Neither the Mayor nor the Governor has weighed in on the plan, and one board member, John Calandra, says he and some like-minded colleagues are eager to hear more details. Mr. Calandra lauds Mr. Sessoms for causing a debate on some fundamental issues that have been taken for granted for years.

Whether or not Mr. Sessoms gets his doctoral program, he has already begun to raise Queens's profile. His biggest success story to date is the new Center for Molecular and Cellular Biology, to be headed by Luc Montagnier, the celebrated French AIDS researcher. This spectacular coup was largely engineered by Bernard Salick, a doctor-turned-entrepreneur who pursued Dr. Montagnier and gave the college $3 million to finance a chair and help build the center. Dr. Montagnier's commitment has allowed Mr. Sessoms to raise $20 million from the state and city governments and, he says, $10 million from pharmaceutical companies. It has also attracted a leading AIDS researcher in the behavioral sciences. Construction is expected to begin this month.

Other AIDS experts say that Dr. Montagnier is more of a star than a cutting-edge figure, but Mr. Sessoms has no qualms about playing the celebrity game. He has persuaded George J. Mitchell, the former Democratic Senator from Maine, to serve as a senior fellow and super guru in a new center for international relations. It didn't sound as if Mr. Mitchell would be around all that much, but, like Dr. Montagnier, he could be a public relations boon for Queens.

Mr. Sessoms has also hired a former CBS executive, Thomas F. Leahy, to serve as director of a new media and communications school and to raise $10 million to get it going. In addition, he has brought in the Center for Educational Innovation, a group of former school administrators, to create a kindergarten through-second-grade laboratory school in conjunction with Queens's education school, as well as a program to train principals and superintendents. Mr. Sessoms may reason that if he keeps throwing things at the wall, at least some will stick.

It is hard to imagine, though, that Mr. Sessoms will ever be accepted inside CUNY. In an intensely moralistic place, he is almost perversely unsentimental and market-oriented. He justifies his initiatives in terms of financial opportunities rather than larger intellectual purposes. "The only thing that matters is money," he says. "If you have a choice between love and money, take money." This is not the kind of clarion call to which academics are prone to respond.

Ms. Bowen says he represents a whole trend in university management: remaking the university along neo-liberal lines, aligning the university with the market. Public universities are, in fact, increasingly hard-pressed to justify their budgets to a skeptical public. Ms. Bowen believes that Mr. Sessoms represents a phenomenon that CUNY has largely resisted until now.

In any case, Mr. Sessoms, an ambitious, restless man with a golden résumé and a personal story that's hard to trump, may not be long for Queens. Within months after his arrival, he was reported to be on the short list for the presidency of Northeastern University; only after the news leaked out, at the end of the process, did he ask to have his name removed. That incident was the source of a reputation for opportunism that he has never shaken.

Mr. Sessoms says he has been approached for about 25 college presidencies, and has said he wasn't interested. But asked if he would consider another offer, he smiled roguishly and said, "It depends on the place." ■

Grab Bag

Our grab bag is full this winter, with articles spanning a range of topics. First up is "Narrowing the Path to Public School Diversity," from Kris Axtman of the *Christian Science Monitor*. The affirmative action debate touched down in Boston this winter, when an appeals court ruled that the famed Boston Latin School's race-based admissions policies were illegal.

"Reading, Writing, and Working," by Debbie Goldberg of the *Washington Post*, analyzes the effects that jobs have on schoolwork and student achievement. As the number of teenagers who hold part-time jobs during the week continues to increase, there's more evidence of its malign impact on schoolwork.

Next, Barbara Kantrowitz and Pat Wingert's *Newsweek* article, "Learning at Home: Does it Pass the Test?," describes the various reasons why parents of 1.5 million students have opted out of conventional public and private schools in favor of educating their children themselves.

Jay Mathews, in a perceptive *New Republic* article, "Averaged Out," explains how "regular" kids are failed by most schools. America's "shopping mall" high schools tend to do well by high-performing students via Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes. They do (relatively) well by low-performing students via special education programs. But the vast majority of kids in the middle are left out, and often become disengaged due to boredom and lax expectations.

We finish on a somber note with Howard Schneider's *Washington Post* article, "In Iraq's Classrooms, Uncle Sam Gets an F." Maybe it's not surprising that young Iraqis are taught to hate the United States. Unfortunately, they are not learning much else: illiteracy rates are climbing, enrollment is decreasing, and children are intellectually isolated. It helps keep our problems in perspective.

SMF

Christian Science Monitor, November 23, 1998

Narrowing the path to public school diversity

Kris Axtman, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

BOSTON -- The question is one of the most sensitive in America today: How far should schools go in promoting diversity?

Boston Latin School, a prestigious public high school, thought it had the answer, admitting half its students based solely on grades and entrance-test scores and the other half weighted by race. In fact, the publicly funded exam school also valued diversity enough to go to court over it.

But last week a federal appeals court ruled that Boston Latin's race-based admissions policies were illegal - a decision with important implications for the debate over affirmative action nationwide.

As the country's first ruling on the constitutionality of racial preferences at the high school level, the decision is expected to force many public-school administrators to rethink their policies - at least for magnet and other specialized schools where admissions policies are stricter.

At the same time, the ruling adds to a growing body of legal opinion that says schools must be very careful in using racial diversity as a factor in admissions. Indeed, the Boston Latin ruling comes on the heels of a 1996 federal appeals court ruling against the University of Texas at Austin, which said diversity in education is not a compelling government interest.

Implications for desegregation

Many people considered that decision by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals just an aberration by a conservative tribunal. But the ruling by the more liberal First Circuit Court of Appeals adds weight to the growing backlash against the use of diversity in admissions - and could even affect desegregation cases.

"Many are wondering whether the [1978] unanimous Supreme Court opinion that ruled schools could take account of race in order to diversify still survives in light of recent court rulings," says Robert Post, a professor of law at the University of California, Berkeley.

The ruling in Boston, a city that has gone through wrenching court-ordered desegregation, stems from a lawsuit by a white family whose daughter was denied admission to Boston Latin. Her grades and test scores gave her a rank higher than some of the qualifying students whose race became a factor in their admission.

"We do not question the School Committee's good intentions," the ruling read. But, "The policy is, at bottom, a mechanism for racial balancing - and placing our imprimatur on racial balancing risks setting a precedent that is both dangerous to our democratic ideals and almost always constitutionally forbidden."

Stephan Thernstrom, a history professor at Harvard University, says last week's ruling will lend weight to school districts fighting to end forced busing as a means of desegregation. "I hope the court is saying that school officials should devote much less effort to worrying about racial mix, and start worrying more about how to better educate children," he says.

In order to use race as a factor, the Supreme Court has said a school must prove a compelling government interest, an ongoing discrimination that warrants diversification, and absence of other avenues. In the Boston case, "there was very little to demonstrate that all other avenues had been exhausted," says Mr. Thernstrom, an expert witness for the plaintiffs.

Researching the value of diversity

The Boston Latin ruling made it clear that the value of diversity must be proved.

"It seems that the judges are not exactly saying that diversity is an unimportant aim, but that the Boston Latin School did not prove the value of diversity," says Meredith Phillips at the University of California, Los Angeles."As [researchers], we need to come up with a more compelling case that diversity has positive outcomes."

But the Boston case raises the fundamental question: What is diversity?

"Boston Latin School confused intellectual diversity with racial diversity, in essence, reducing it to skin color," says Terry Pell, senior counsel at the Center for Individual Rights in Washington, which brought the Texas case.

The Washington Post, October 25, 1998

By DEBBIE GOLDBERG
who writes frequently on education.

Jennifer Barrell was late so often for her first period precalculus class last year that her math teacher could have given her a "no credit" in the course simply for her tardiness.

"He was nice enough," recalled the 17-year-old senior at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria. "He knew I knew the work, so he cut me a break."

Jennifer's punctuality problem had nothing to do with laziness; she was simply exhausted. Three days a week, as soon as school ended, she rushed off to her job at a hair salon, where she worked until 9 p.m. shampooing and conditioning hair. When she finally got home, she started on her homework, often working until midnight. The next morning she had to be up by 6 a.m. to get to school on time—when she was able to pull it off.

Despite her grueling schedule, Jennifer loved her $5-an-hour job—and the earnings that not only provided spending money for such typical teenage purchases as clothes and shoes but also allowed her to contribute to household expenses while her mother was out of work last year. "I like working," said Barrell, who started working (at a different hair salon) in 10th grade. "I wanted to feel useful."

Jennifer isn't alone. These days, about three-quarters of all high school seniors, two-thirds of juniors and one-half of sophomores work at some point during the school year, according to Laurence Steinberg, psychology professor at Philadelphia's Temple University and an expert on working teens. A Rutgers University survey covering 1995-1997 found that an average of almost 4 million youths from ages 15 to 17 had jobs.

For high school students, working seems to be as American as, well, apple pie. The good news is that studies have found that students can work moderate numbers of hours without jeopardizing their school work, health or social life. But experts generally agree that working more than about 20 hours a week, which nearly 40 percent of high school seniors do, can have significant negative effects on schooling and health.

According to Steinberg, students who work longer hours tend to be less involved in school, spend less time on homework, get slightly lower grades than their counterparts working fewer or no hours, and admit they pay less attention in class. And students who work long hours tend to spend fewer years getting an education, added Nancy Crowell, staff officer of the Committee on Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor at the National Academy of Sciences.

In addition, teenagers who work more tend to engage more than their peers in such risky behaviors as alcohol, drug and tobacco use. They're also at greater risk for early sexual encounters, pregnancies, suicide attempts and violent behavior, according to a study of 12,000 adolescents led by University of Minnesota researcher Michael Resnick and published last year in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Then there are other, less measurable, effects, such as sleep deprivation, that can be a real problem for working teens, particularly those keeping late hours waiting tables and working at convenience stores. "Some kids work late hours in the evening, and when they come to school in the morning, it's very, very difficult for them to focus and pay attention," said John Porter, principal of T.C. Williams High School.

On the other hand, there may be some benefits to working a reasonable number of hours, said Jeylan Mortimer, a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University. In a survey of 8,000 St. Paul, Minn., public school students, she found that boys who worked fewer than 20 hours a week didn't compromise their schoolwork and eventually went on to more postsecondary education than their nonworking peers. Although the findings weren't clear for girls, Mortimer thinks that having to balance school and work enabled the high school students to adjust more easily to the demands of college.

Teenagers can learn many skills even in the most menial jobs, such as showing up for work on time, getting along with co-workers and customers, dressing appropriately, and carrying out responsibilities. Barrell, the senior at T.C. Williams, said that working gives her "a little bit of personal integrity, knowing I'm good at a job and people respect me for what I do."

While after-school jobs are nothing new, both the number of students working and the hours they work per week started mushrooming in the 1970s. The work world changed—malls sprang up with huge numbers of stores to fill with sales clerks, store hours expanded beyond the traditional 9-to-5 day, and the "blue laws" barring Sunday sales became a thing of the past. "We're created a 24-hour world, and these youngsters are in great demand," said Arthur Shostak, sociology professor and director of the Center for Employment Futures at Drexel University in Philadelphia.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of teens—about 77 percent of them—are employed in the retail and service sectors, according to U.S. Census data. They're the ones you see behind the counter at McDonald's and ringing up sales at the Gap.

Why are so many students working? Mostly to pay for cars and clothes, Steinberg said. The typical teen worker comes from a middle- to upper-middle class home and is trying to earn spending money for such things as car insurance, expensive sneakers, concert tickets and dates. In other words, he said, most teens aren't trying to help support their families or save for college.

"My car," agreed Bradford Beadle, a 17-year-old senior at Springfield (Pa.) High School, explaining why he worked at a bagel shop last year and now works in his school's technology center up to 20 hours a week. "I needed it fixed, filled with gas, I just bought a computer, my car broke again, and I need $2,600 to pay for a band trip to Europe," he

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said, rattling off his many expenses.

And, given the luxuries that teenagers can crave, it's no wonder parents often buy into the notion that their teens should be earning some spending money and learning some job responsibilities. "Many parents out there believe once a kid is 16 or 17 they ought to get out there and start working," said Springfield High School principal Thomas Stapleford, who joked that he counsels students while picking up prescriptions at the local CVS pharmacy, where many of his students work. Although counselors will talk to parents if they think work is interfering too much with school, Stapleford said, "we don't have the right to strongly intervene."

While many students say their parents will let them work only if they keep their grades up, many also admit to cutting academic corners. Barrell studies for tests during lunch and sometimes turns in what should be rough drafts as final papers. Jillian Gushue, an 18-year-old senior at Springfield High who works six days a week at a grocery store, has seen her grades drop since she started working almost full time. The irony: Her goal is to save money for college, but now she fears that her grades aren't good enough to get her into the college of her choice.

John Porter, the T.C. Williams principal, can understand the allure of a teenage job. While in high school, he worked at an Alexandria gas station after classes, earning money to pay for some things his parents wouldn't—gas, dates, ballgame tickets. But the job also served another purpose: "It helped me realize I didn't want to be working there at 45, changing tires in the snow at night," Porter recalled.

Besides the wide availability of jobs, some experts think the student work ethic is fueled by a lack of homework and standards. After all, how demanding could high school be if teenagers can do their school work and, in many cases, hold down a full-time job? "The average American high school student spends less than five hours a week on homework," Steinberg said. "American student achievement, particularly at the high school level, is terrible compared to other countries." He acknowledged, however, that work is only one reason for this.

In fact, 53 percent of U.S. high school students from 16 to 19 work during the school year, compared with only 17 percent of Japanese youths from 15 to 19. Only the United Kingdom, with 43 percent of its 13- to 17-year-olds working, comes close, said Crowell of the Committee on Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor. "American students have lots of free time with no demands, so they fill it with employment," complained Shostak, the Drexel professor. And while working moderate hours may not necessarily be bad for teens, he said, there are better ways kids could be spending their time. His suggestions: more and better homework, community service, perhaps nature study or meditation.

Steinberg thinks working not only detracts from school work, but is helping to shape a generation of conspicuous consumers. "Corporate America clearly has taken advantage of American teenagers, persuading them it's more important to earn money after school than do school work," he said. "They'll argue it's building character, but I'm not so sure the character we want to be building is that it's good to earn $150 and spend it every week." ■

Newsweek, October 5, 1998

Learning At Home: Does It Pass The Test?

THIS FALL, AS MOST KIDS MADE THEIR ANNUAL TREK BACK TO THE classroom, a small but growing army of parents just said no to school. Some, like Jean Forbes of Alexandria, Va., thought their children needed extra attention. Forbes is a former actress whose current career is teaching her two sons, Aaron, 14, and Jesse, 7, and running a theater group for 40 other kids who are taught in their homes. She and her husband, Jan, pulled Aaron, who is dyslexic, out of public school six years ago because they felt teachers weren't helping him enough.

Other parents want to give their kids the chance to follow their interests rather than a textbook. Outside Los Angeles, Marcy Kinsey, a mother of three kids—ages 11, 9 and 7—calls herself an "unschooler." Right now her kids are studying bats, everything from their diet to their wingspan to the specifics of their natural habitat. They've even built a bat house in the backyard, which required many hours of practical math problems.

Still other parents pull their kids out of school to solve what they think is a short-term problem—and find long-term challenges. Eric and Joyce Burges, who live outside Baton Rouge, La., began home schooling nearly a decade ago after their oldest son, Eric Jr., had a disastrous year at a selective magnet high school. It was a struggle at first; neither is a professional teacher. But as Eric Jr.'s confidence rose at home, so did Joyce's, and she now teaches her four other kids, ages 15 to 3, at home as well. School begins every morning at 7 and lasts until lunch. Joyce says home schooling has been a test of her strengths and weaknesses. Accepting the latter, she hired music and algebra tutors. "I know what I want them to learn, and I know what they want to learn," she says. "I don't have to do it all."

Just a few years ago, home schooling was the province of religious fundamentalists who wanted to instill their values in their children and back-to-the-earth types who rejected the institutional nature of public schools. Now it's edging ever closer to the mainstream. In 1993—after years of court battles—it became legal in all 50 states for parents to take charge of their kid's education from kindergarten to college. While there are no national statistics, researchers who study home schooling estimate that as many as 1.5 million youngsters are currently being taught primarily by their mothers or fathers. That's five times the estimated number of home schoolers just a decade ago and bigger than the nation's largest public-school system, New York City's. The increase is especially remarkable in an era of two-income families, since it pretty much requires one parent to stay home (generally the mother), at some financial sacrifice. In a recent NEWSWEEK Poll, 59 percent of those surveyed said home-schooled kids were at least as well educated as students in traditional schools. "Home schoolers' image is not wacko, fringe, lunatic-type people anymore," says Brian Ray, president of the Home Education Research Institute in Salem, Ore., a nonprofit group. "Today almost everyone knows a home schooler, so it's more socially acceptable."

Some of the new home-schooling parents are looking for a way to reclaim family closeness in an increasingly fast-paced society. Others have kids with special needs, perhaps because they're highly gifted or have learning disabilities or emotional problems. Still other parents worry about unsavory influences in school—drugs, alcohol, sex, violence. Florida education officials report that in the last few years, the No. 1 reason parents gave for home schooling was "safety." Some intend to teach at home all the way through 12th grade. Others see home schooling as a way to get through a bad patch in a kid's school life.

Their lesson plans are as diverse as their reasons for dropping out of the system, but what unites all these parents is a belief that they can do a better job at home than trained educators in a conventional school. That would have been an outrageous notion a generation ago, when far fewer parents had college degrees and most people regarded teachers and schools with more respect and even awe. Today parents are much better educated, hooked up to a world of information via the Internet and inundated with headlines about problems plaguing public schools. They see home schooling as one more step in the evolution of parent power that has given birth to school-choice programs, vouchers and charter schools. "Americans are becoming fussy consumers rather than trusting captives of a state monopoly," says Chester Finn, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank. "They've declared their independence and are taking matters into their own hands."

But while home schooling is winning converts, it still has plenty of critics who worry that millions of youngsters will grow up without adequate academic or social skills. "Kids need to be successful in three overlapping spheres—at home, at school and with peers," says Phoenix pediatrician Daniel Kessler, a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics developmental-behavior group. "Home schooling compresses all that into a single setting that can be very difficult for kids." The National Education Associa-

tion, the nation's biggest teachers union, backs much more rigorous regulation. Only 37 states now have statutes that set standards for home schooling, says Christopher Klicka, executive director of the National Center for Home Education, an advocacy group. About half of those demand some kind of annual testing or evaluation; the rest require only that certain subjects be covered within a specified time frame. Many educators say it's the government's responsibility to make sure kids get what they need to become productive citizens. "After all, if home schooling fails," says Ronald Areglado of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, "we pay the freight" when a person ends up on public assistance or in jail. Areglado has good reason for his concern; as a principal, he saw a home-schooled kid who got no instruction at all from his parents.

But home-schooling parents say they are better equipped than ever before to give kids what they need. "What they're doing is reinventing the idea of school," says Patricia Lines, a senior research analyst for the U.S. Department of Education. The Internet and sophisticated new educational software help fill in academic gaps. If they need more inspiration, they can browse through bookstore shelves filled with how-to books and subscribe to dozens of newsletters and magazines with titles like Growing Without Schooling that are packed with ads for home-schooling textbooks, videos and software, and seminars (chart). "There are much better, more sophisticated curriculum materials available," says Kathi Kearney, an expert in the home schooling of gifted students at Iowa State University.

These tools have transformed the conventional image of a home-schooling family: a couple of kids with workbooks open on the kitchen table under the supervision of Mom or Dad. Not only have the new generation of home schoolers moved beyond workbooks, they've also moved well out of the kitchen and often join home-schooling cooperatives, where parents take turns teaching different subjects and get together for group field trips. Jean Forbes's home-schooling theater group in Virginia is more than just a chance for kids to enjoy center stage. History and even science lessons are part of the program. When the girls put on hoop skirts for "Little Women," they talked about how children played a century ago. When they used dry ice onstage in a play, they talked about the science behind the special effects.

Home-schooling parents are also turning to a surprising source for help: public schools. In the wake of lawsuits in many states by home-schooling parents, more communities are opening the doors to school libraries or computer rooms. Some districts have "part time" options that allow kids to sign up for a few courses or participate in extracurricular activities like the football team or the band. Oregon even allows students to register for courses at different schools, so that a teenager could take advanced biology at one high school and art at another. Almost every state now has a home-schooling coordinator, and some, such as Washington and Iowa, have established resource centers for parents—giving families a chance to get something in return for their taxes. In California—where the troubled public schools have pushed thousands of parents into home schooling—many families sign up for the independent-study program at their local public schools to get books and other materials. A teacher monitors the child's progress, usually through monthly visits. Jon Shemitz, a computer-programming consultant, enrolled his son, Sam, 10, in independent study through his district near Santa Cruz. During the teacher's monthly visits, Shemitz says, she "fills out the paperwork, sits around and chats and allows us to participate in a few programs like field trips."

Despite these new resources, no one really knows how this new generation of home schoolers will turn out. There are no reliable long-term studies, but advocates say home schoolers generally do as well as other kids on standardized tests (chart), and some are accepted into the most elite colleges. Harvard has even assigned an admissions officer, David Illingsworth, to review applications from home schoolers. "Ten years ago, if you didn't have a diploma we didn't want you," he says. "Today we're always willing to look at different kinds of credentials." Other colleges have mixed views of home-schooled students. In one recent survey of admissions officers, only 20 percent thought that parents were better able to motivate their children than teachers. But 83 percent agreed that high-school students could be adequately taught at home.

At every age, a strong parent-child relationship is far more important than any particular curriculum, experts say. Those bonds can be stretched when the whole family is together 24-7. Kids have to respect parents as teachers and still love them as Mom and Dad—a difficult task. Parents don't even have the luxury of time off while their children are in the classroom; they are always on duty. It's so tough that some parents give up after only a year or two. "I've seen it tear families apart," says William Coleman, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of North Carolina.

Kids with special needs—gifted or learning disabled—are more likely than most to benefit from home schooling, researchers say, but only if their parents have the right training and resources. Ryan Abradi, a 10-year-old who lives in central Maine, started multiplying when he was just 2½, and even then understood the concept of negative numbers. "From the beginning, he seemed hard-wired for math," says his mother, Valerie, a mechanical engineer. When he reached school age, she checked out the local gifted program and could tell right away that Ryan was already well beyond it. "He had no patience," she says. "He was intolerant of the questions other kids would ask." Ryan is now happily at home, working his way through second-semester college calculus.

Home-schooling parents reject critics' claims that their kids aren't well socialized. Many of them say they've overcome the isolation by getting kids involved in Scouts, 4-H or sports teams. "Ninety percent of these kids play with people outside their families," says Brian Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute. But home-schooled kids themselves say they are different—in both good and bad ways. They're probably more likely to be independent and self-motivated, but group activities can be a struggle. Eighteen-year-old Jon Williams of Missoula, Mont., is clearly outgoing and confident: he's a Republican candidate for his state's legislature. But Williams, who has been home schooled since ninth grade, credits the eight years he spent in Christian school with helping him hone his basic social skills. He doesn't buy group activities like sports as the great socializers. "You get a whole bunch of regressive kids together, and they all tend to be really shy," he says.

Social isolation can be especially damaging in the middle-school years, says Coleman of the University of North Carolina. "Parents have this Pollyanna view that they're going to keep their kids away from bad influences," he says, "when kids biologically and psychosocially are going to want to push away" from their families.

At some point, of course, home-schooled kids will move out on their own. What lessons will serve them best? The ultimate goal of any educational path is to inspire love of learning, a passion that lasts a lifetime. One vision of what the future might hold for a few members of this new generation of home schoolers is embodied in the Not Back to School Camp, an annual late-summer gathering held in the woods near the Oregon coast. The camp is run by Grace Llewellyn, author of "The Teenage Liberation Handbook." Not a parent herself, Llewellyn was inspired to promote home schooling by the writing of education reformer John Holt. So while the rest of America was preparing for another season in the blackboard jungle, 162 home-schooled teenagers spent their days going to theater workshops and lectures on subjects like Radical Honesty, and generally taking comfort in the company of kindred spirits. "There's no reason for kids to be isolated," she says.

And indeed, isolation was the last thing on Caitlin Stern's mind. The 15-year-old longtime home schooler spent much of the last year studying bald eagles with a biologist in her hometown of Haines, Alaska. At the camp, she was busy running from workshop to workshop—taking charge of her own education. "I don't have time for school," she says. "I have way too much stuff to do."

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How schools fail regular kids.

AVERAGED OUT

By Jay Mathews

Joy Sarlo attended her art and studio photography class at Mamaroneck High School in the Westchester suburbs of New York City only five times that semester, but the teacher did not object and only bothered to mark her absent twice. Her grade, he said, would be based on her final portfolio of photographs. But, when she tried to hand in her portfolio on the last day of school, the teacher was nowhere to be found. He was not in his classroom. He was not in the department office. No one could tell her how to reach him. So she brought the photographs home and put them in a drawer in her living room, feeling more annoyed than concerned. After all, she had received passing marks, sometimes high ones, for courses in which she had done little work in the past. And, sure enough, the report card that arrived in July showed that turning in no work at all had not counted against her in this class, either. Her final grade was an 85, a nice, solid B.

Sarlo, now a student at Westchester Community College, allegedly had the same rights and responsibilities as the rest of the 1,050 students at Mamaroneck High, one of the best public schools in the country, but she had come to understand that the expectations for her were different from those for many of her classmates. Her father was a police officer for the village of Mamaroneck. Her mother was a nurse. They did not live in one of the large brick homes in the hills of the Ridgely neighborhood or in one of the $1 million bungalows with wraparound porches near Long Island Sound.

Her grades, usually Bs and Cs, and her ambition to be a school teacher may have been relatively ordinary, but there was no question of her intellectual potential. She could detect faulty reasoning. She had a lively interest in literature and art. She was a lifeguard and a cheerleader and probably knew more people on campus than any other student at the school. Occasionally a teacher would engage her full attention and successfully demand that she devote significant energies to a class. But that did not happen often. Usually she was passed along with grades just good enough to secure a place in a state university somewhere.

In short, she was an average student, more vibrant and social than most, but otherwise typical of the majority of the 13 million public high school students in the country. And she did not feel she learned very much at Mamaroneck, despite its reputation, because the school, like most American high schools, did not care very much about challenging and deepening her skills. It preferred to keep her and most of the rest of the student body emotionally secure and reasonably content, minimizing any possibility of complaints about hard work or bad grades.

The energy and resources those same schools devote to students who are not average are quite different. On the low side, a study by Richard Rothstein of Washington's Economic Policy Institute showed that special education programs to rescue the worst students rose from four to 19 percent of all school spending between 1967 and 1996 in nine representative districts. On the high side, the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, which offer college-level courses and tests to high school students, are growing rapidly, with more than 600,000 students a year taking A.P. or I.B. tests in high school. But this is still barely ten percent of all juniors and seniors, and most schools discourage most students—including many who will be in college in a year—from taking the risks of such concentrated effort.

It is difficult to be critical of the coddling of the average American high school student because the habit springs from the purest motives. American educators are warm and generous people who have their students' best interests at heart. Many of them are convinced that, if they demand too much from students, their young egos will bruise and their already erratic interest in their studies will vanish. There is a tendency at Mamaroneck, and nearly all the other schools I have visited, to equate difficult homework and long exams with unnecessary stress. Why force such nice young people to grind themselves down, some teachers ask, when they will have a chance to learn these subjects in college anyway?

But this question begs a different one: If average stu-

dents do not become engaged with these disciplines in high school, when they have a chance to learn in relatively small classes with their friends and a readily available teacher, how can they be assured of learning to love the subject matter in a college lecture hall with 500 other drowsy note-takers and a professor droning into a microphone? And, when we, as parents, worry about an average kid who's forced to stay up until two in the morning to finish his homework, are we not forgetting that the courses and teachers that kept us up until two in the morning are often the ones we remember most fondly? Fondly because they forced us to show how far we could go beyond our own expectations, in some cases with life-changing results. Could it be that one of the reasons so many average students hate high school is because it is often undemanding?

A dumb and repetitive lesson is unlikely to get anyone very far, and students know it. The nonprofit group Public Agenda surveyed 1,300 high school students nationally and found 65 percent thought they were not trying very hard and 75 percent felt they would learn more if pushed harder by better teachers. More than 35 percent of first-year college students surveyed by UCLA in 1996 said they had often been bored by their high school classes.

Blame for the sorry state of the average student belongs with several parties, including the students themselves. Motivation is a problem in this age group. Teachers who try to push kids are often unpopular. Sarlo expressed warm feelings for almost all her teachers but had little good to say of an English teacher who forced her to work harder on her writing than anyone else she had encountered.

Meanwhile, teachers who welcome marginal students into honors or A.P. courses are often accused by their top students (and their parents) of dumbing down the course. Parents of average students are rarely more supportive. They cringe at the thought of a mediocre grade and are apt to advise a child not to take a course so challenging it might produce a low B or a C. This is despite the fact that college admissions officers repeatedly tell students, teachers, and parents that they would prefer to see a lower grade in a harder course. They want students who are willing to stretch their intellect.

Squelching the widespread fear of failure is not easy—particularly with test scores and passing rates becoming so important in political assessments of school districts. Few schools allow students into A.P. or I.B. courses if there is any chance they might do poorly. So the teachers and administrators in those schools never learn what happens when a student takes a difficult course like the A.P. or I.B. and flunks its nationally designed and calibrated test. The assumption is that this devastates the student. But those few students I have interviewed who have been allowed to fail in this way say they are much better off than if they had been barred from the course and the test, and their teachers agree. Despite the setback, they have not only learned more than they would have in the course reserved for average students but have gained a much clearer view of what they have to do to study at a college level. This doesn't prove that it's always a good idea to send an average kid into an advanced class, but it does suggest that further research into the question is warranted.

Unfortunately, little research has been done. In part, that's because only a few public schools open their A.P. and I.B. courses to any student who wants to take them. These include the Stanton College Preparatory School in Jacksonville, Florida; Midwood High in Brooklyn; Jordan High in Durham, North Carolina; Southside High in Greenville, South Carolina; Stevenson High in Lincolnshire, Illinois; and North Hollywood High in Los Angeles. Some of them provide useful safety nets. Washington-Lee High in Arlington, Virginia, will watch marginal students in I.B. or A.P. courses carefully and give them the opportunity to switch to less demanding classes in the same period if the work proves too much for them.

A very few teachers have even summoned the courage to put their most and least motivated students in the same classroom. Jack Esformes, who teaches at T.C. Williams High in Alexandria, Virginia, assigns seven students planning to take the A.P. test to each of his five government classes for average seniors, each class having about two dozen students. The A.P. students are volunteers, some pleased to join a mixed class and some drawn by the established reputation of the teacher and his course. Esformes incites frequent, vigorous class arguments over civil rights, party discipline, federalism, judicial independence, and other relevant topics, with every student urged by the other students to take part. The A.P. students do as well on the test as those in the classes that have no non-A.P. students. The non-A.P. students become involved in the subject matter, develop friendships with the A.P. students, and sometimes even take the A.P. test, Esformes said.

The benefit of enabling advanced and average kids to study together is worth considering. Joy Sarlo had eight close friends at Mamaroneck, some book smart, some street-smart, so tight that they shared a farewell ad in the yearbook. But rarely did she find herself in classes with her A-student friends, and she missed that. She said that there was often no better way to cut through a dense lecture or unscramble a complicated homework assignment than to have a friend explain it. The friend often found her own understanding deepened when she had to put the concept in her own words.

Sarlo said she was grateful for her circle of friends and the lessons they had learned from each other about life outside the classroom. But, if they had been placed in the same classes, buttressed by Mamaroneck's many energetic teachers, they might have significantly enriched the memories they took with them to Georgetown and Duke and Michigan and Dartmouth or, in Sarlo's case, to Westchester Community College.

JAY MATHEWS, an education reporter for *The Washington Post*, is the author of *Class Struggle: What's Wrong (and Right) with America's Best Public High Schools.*

The Washington Post, November 9, 1998

In Iraq's Classrooms, Uncle Sam Gets an F

By Howard Schneider
Washington Post Foreign Service

BAGHDAD, Iraq

The children at the Wakady School know from their parents that some things are lacking in this era of U.N. sanctions against Iraq.

And they think they know who is to blame.

"America has hurt us. America is our enemy," said Yassir Jabar Abbas, 11. "They attacked the schools. . . . America attacked homes and apartments."

"Life before was better," added Athara Hammad, 13. "We can't buy good food."

Beyond that, however, the world view from the children's classroom in downtown Baghdad becomes less definitive and suggests the degree to which education has been as much a casualty of Iraq's isolation as has its health standards and income.

Among a group of children 10 to 13 years old, finishing their last year in primary school and selected by their teacher as the most articulate of the class, none knew that their country's army had entered neighboring Kuwait in 1990, and none knew that other Arab nations had participated in the U.S.-led military coalition that reversed the Iraqi invasion.

Immersed in the Koran because of the country's mandatory religious-education classes and big fans of President Saddam Hussein as well as the Tom and Jerry cartoon show, they said they know little about the seismic events of the last decade that may have shaped their options in life as much as any other factor.

All they can say with certainty, in fact, is that American bombs fell on their country and that afterward it was harder to get meat and eggs and cheese. It is a logic that school administrator Turkey Ibrahim shares.

The children have been taught what they need to know, Ibrahim said—that "the reason for the embargo is that Iraq is a big country and is the mother of the Arabs, and . . . America does not want Iraq to become a great country."

Discussion of the Kuwait invasion is avoided, he said, because "we don't consider Kuwait a country."

Likewise, any mention of the fact that Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other countries in the region took part in the war against Iraq is also excluded because "Iraq is trying to strengthen our relations with Arabs," Ibrahim said.

The status of public education in Iraq is an emerging concern of U.N. officials stationed here. They note that after nearly two decades of conflict, first against Iran, then following the invasion of Kuwait, school enrollment has dropped and illiteracy has increased.

"This country had achieved practically universal primary education" said Philippe Heffinck, head of the U.N. Children's Fund in Baghdad. Now, however, U.N. statistics indicate that fewer than 70 percent of 6-year-olds are enrolling in school on time. Illiteracy, meanwhile, increased from an estimated 27 percent during the mid-1980s to around 40 percent today.

In an interview with the Reuters news agency following his recent resignation as head of U.N. humanitarian programs in Iraq, Denis Halliday said he felt the intellectual isolation of Iraq's younger generation may have as profound an effect on the country's future as any other aspect of the embargo.

Compared to their parents' generation, many of whom traveled frequently and often received some education outside Iraq, today's Iraqi children have seen little of the world, and those who might be able to leave the country for school often do so for good, depriving the society of their experience and training.

In a world of satellite dishes, cell phones and global markets, they have grown up in a country whose skies are largely free of airplanes—the consequence of U.S.-enforced flight bans and an international air-travel embargo—and whose media is utterly subservient to the government. Tom and Jerry and some other outside programming is aired on state-run television but only in between lengthy tributes to the president.

CNN is piped into the Baghdad press center but is not available, for example, at the city's top hotel, the Rasheed.

"They don't have a great deal of exposure to travel, even to reading materials, television, never mind technological change," Halliday said. "I think these people are going to have a real problem in terms of how to deal with the world in the near future."

What that means for the children at the Wakady school is a bright smile, a snap to attention and a shout of "Long live his excellency Saddam Hussein!" when a foreign visitor enters the classroom—but a blank stare when that visitor asks if they have heard of the Internet or the World Wide Web.

In her family's small apartment, down an alleyway near the carpet souk and open markets of Rasheed Street, the parents of Rana Mohammed, 14, explain that their daughter has dropped out of school because they can't afford the clothes and other expenses.

Her father, Mohammed Rasheed, said his salary as a security guard at the Agriculture Ministry once was enough to feed and clothe his family well. Now they rely on government food rations and even then have had to sell much of their furniture to survive.

His eldest son, Wallid, is now helping with his salary as a soldier, but the young man's ambitions far outstrip the realities of a city that was, in the time of ancient Babylon, a center of world culture.

Wallid, 22, said he'll leave the army after his term is done to look for a "good job"—preferably one as a driver on the cab route from Amman, Jordan, to Baghdad.

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